

**Teacher and Staff Perceptions of Trauma-Responsive Problem Solving: Qualitative Case
Study**

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Abstract

Childhood trauma is an epidemic. As children enter classrooms, school staff members face many students who have experienced trauma and present challenging behaviors due to childhood exposure to trauma. Despite research on childhood trauma as a problem, how trauma impacts children, and how staff struggle to manage classroom behaviors, a gap still exists. A gap exists in the research regarding how staff members perceive collaborative problem solving as a response to children who have experienced trauma and pose challenging behaviors. In servant leadership theory and hierarchy of needs theory, the study addressed teacher perceptions of the collaborative problem-solving model, if given training, regarding teacher capacity and student achievement. Using purposive sampling, 15 K–5 teachers and staff members from an urban school district in Illinois participated in semi-structured interviews and surveys. Document analysis transpired for all notes from the problem-solving process. Data were analyzed using open coding and uploaded into MAXQDA for axial coding. The investigation uncovered the following: (a) staff members require training in trauma-responsive practices to minimize weaknesses in practice, (b) staff members recognize the importance of building collaborative relationships with students, and (c) collaborative problem solving has a positive impact on student achievement and behaviors. The research could inform school and district administrators of the need for trauma-responsive training in relationship building; administrators may look to the collaborative problem-solving model to accomplish this task. More research is needed to determine the perceptions of students regarding the problem-solving model.

Keywords: trauma-responsive, collaborative problem-solving, student–teacher relationships, trauma-informed

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family. My children, Alexis, Noah and Isabelle have been patient beyond measure—especially on those weekends where the work consumed me. Noah has been especially important to this work. He, in fact, was the impetus behind the work. From the moment I considered embarking on this journey, Tyler, told me I could do it. Without even having to ask him, throughout the process, he made countless arrangements so I would be able to work uninterrupted, and in peace and quiet. His undying belief in me allowed me to feel confident in my ability to complete this journey and achieve this milestone. In many ways, he is the reason why I took the jump and landed safely.

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Finally, I dedicate this work to all of the adults who struggle with challenging children and to all of the children who have difficulties meeting expectations. You are the reason for the work.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Educators have witnessed an increase in students who display challenging classroom behaviors (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). While in 2008, an estimated quarter of children had experienced trauma, the percentage in 2015 was closer to three quarters (Holmes et al., 2015). Unexpected actions often arise due to childhood trauma (Barr, 2018; Pur, 2014). Typically, although not always, trauma involves abuse, neglect, or household dysfunction (Terrasi & Galarce, 2017). Researchers conducted studies to determine if teachers and staff believe educators can assist students who have experienced trauma and display challenging behaviors in the classroom (Day et al., 2017; Hambacher, 2018; Holmes et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016; Nadeem et al., 2011). Research has shown adverse childhood experiences affect health and the ability to learn (Garner et al., 2015). School staff asserted a regular part of a teacher's day is dedicated to addressing disruptive student behaviors (Blitz et al., 2016).

The qualitative case study explored teacher perceptions of a trauma-responsive model for solving problems in school settings. Trauma-sensitive approaches take into consideration the impact trauma has had on a person. Being trauma-responsive requires understanding what trauma is and how these negative experiences manifest in classrooms and schools. Using collaborative problem solving (CPS), adults and students engage in dialogue to remedy the unsolved problems students display. Training in the CPS model may become a foundation for how teachers and staff members begin to build relationships with students who have experienced trauma. While trauma cannot be healed, research supports positive relationships lessen the harmful effects of trauma (Arincorayan et al., 2017; McConnico et al., 2016). The present research may impact students and staff in the targeted population by building positive and supportive relationships. The study, in corroboration with Blitz et al. (2016), shows teachers and

staff in the targeted population are more equipped to support students with challenging behaviors resulting from traumatic experiences. The results could be used district-wide as a model for how to support students who exhibit challenging behaviors. The problem, purpose and significance, research questions, and theoretical framework are explained. Common terms are defined and assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations are provided.

Background of the Problem

Trauma is evident across the nation. Defined in many ways, trauma may lessen the victim's ability to cope in a healthy manner (Alisic, 2012; Garner et al., 2015). Although further underlying issues may be present, events involving abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction can lead to traumatic experiences (Terrasi & Galarce, 2017). In 2005, research showed a quarter of students entering school had adverse incidents, and in 2015, research indicated more than 75% of students entering classrooms had experienced one or more traumatic events (Holmes et al., 2015). Trauma may be appearing in classrooms all over the country. In schools, trauma presents itself in many behaviors that are challenging for teachers and staff to manage, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Frydman & Mayor, 2017), misconduct, oppositional defiance, reactive attachment disorder (Holmes et al., 2015), and disinhibited social engagement and acute stress (Brunzell et al., 2015). Schools are in a position to support students who have socioemotional needs due to exposure to trauma, as teachers and staff are first responders to students and possess the ability to help students decrease the effects of trauma (Exner, 2017; Flower et al., 2015; Vona et al., 2018). Staff are ill equipped to support students who have experienced trauma (Strom et al., 2016). Training is essential to provide educational staff members with the knowledge necessary to understand the effects of trauma on the brain (Barr, 2018; Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). When provided training, teachers reported having more

confidence in supporting students (Alisic, 2012; Vanderwegen, 2013). With strong servant leaders who understand the importance of meeting students' basic needs, this training could become a part of school professional development models. With a trauma-responsive lens, school staff can support student needs, such as providing a sense of love and belonging, essential in a human's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943).

A focus needs to be placed on training school staff in trauma-responsive practices as educators report a lack of capacity to support students with behavioral issues, possibly resulting from exposure to trauma (Strom et al., 2016). Central to healthy child development is the need for supportive adults (Collins et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2018; Obsuth et al., 2017). Positive relationships may be vital to fortifying the healing process (Brunzell et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016). Constructive and encouraging relationships build a sense of trust and safekeeping in a child, necessary for repairing the damage incurred from trauma (McConnico et al., 2016). Building on the lower levels of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs becomes central to the recovery process.

Collaborative problem solving (CPS) is a strategy which educators can learn. In this trauma-responsive method, school staff members form authentic relationships with students while facilitating growth in student socioemotional skills, such as empathy and problem solving. The philosophy behind CPS states a child does well if equipped with the skill, such as the ability to ignore distractions, needed to obey the expected behavior, and without the capacity to perform the skill, students will not be successful (Greene & Winkler, 2019; Maddox et al., 2018). In this four-step model, adults determine the student's lagging skills, or behavioral deficit, inhibiting the ability to meet the expected behavior, and how the lack of capacity in a skill becomes an unsolved problem (Greene & Winkler, 2019). Once discovered, the unsolved problem, or unmet

expectation, is shared in a CPS conversation with the student (Stetson & Plog, 2016). This process may strengthen relationships, teach children skills, and support the brain's development (Greene & Winkler, 2019). The four steps of the model include the ALSUP Step, where the adult determines what skills are lagging, the Empathy Step, where the adult determines what is getting in the way of the child meeting the expectation, the Define Adult Concerns Step, where the adult shares how the unmet expectation affects others, and finally the Invitation Step where the child is encouraged to join the adult in a problem-solving conversation (Greene & Winkler, 2019). This model could help school staff understand how to support students in the classroom who exhibit challenging behaviors resulting from trauma exposure.

Statement of the Problem

The problem emerging in education is the lack of educator training to strengthen teacher capacity to assist students with behavior issues, often originating from childhood trauma (Day et al., 2017; Hambacher, 2018; Holmes et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016; Nadeem et al., 2011). The number of students who have experienced childhood trauma has grown (Holmes et al., 2015). As first responders to students in classrooms, school staff have the opportunity to support students who have experienced trauma and often present challenging behaviors (Exner, 2017; Flower et al., 2015; Vona et al., 2018). Research has shown teachers are ill equipped to support students who have experienced trauma (Strom et al., 2016). Training is critical to provide teachers with the knowledge necessary to understand the effects of trauma on the brain (Barr, 2018; Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018).

Teachers reported being more confident about supporting students who have experienced trauma when trained to do so (Alisic, 2012; Vanderwegen, 2013). Educators note school leaders have not made efforts to build teacher capacity to assist students with behavior issues, commonly

stemming from childhood trauma (Day et al., 2017; Hambacher, 2018; Holmes et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016; Nadeem et al., 2011). School staff need the training to improve educator capacity to assist students with challenging behaviors, especially when a school staff member is aware of a child's trauma history. More research is needed to determine what methods teachers can use to support students. Research is needed to explore teacher perceptions of specific trauma-responsive practices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to examine school staff perceptions of a trauma-responsive problem-solving method. The goal of the study emerged from the need to build teacher capacity in how to assist students with challenging behaviors, especially students who have experienced trauma (Day et al., 2017; Hambacher, 2018; Holmes et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016; Nadeem et al., 2011). The study examined staff perceptions about the CPS process. The study explored staff member's experiences with learning the CPS process and how professional development affected teacher capacity.

The researcher applied a qualitative case study methodology to allow for a more in-depth analysis of staff member perceptions (Yin, 2011). Using an instrumental case study focused on a group of teachers in an urban elementary school, researcher-created questions were developed to collect information based on teacher training and capacity. Educational staff members were selected based on interest and contact with students. The researcher used semi-structured interviews, surveys, and document analysis to triangulate results. Virtual interviews were recorded and transcribed, and member checking ensured credibility and dependability. Data were open coded and axial coded using MAXQDA and manual coding.

The goal of the research was to discover staff perceptions of the CPS process. By

exploring staff member responses, a further understanding of the staff perspective was determined. The study results could benefit the school employing the targeted population, the district, and the state. Existing research has not explored what staff members believe about training in CPS or staff member's perceptions of any benefit using the model. Through collecting the data, how staff perceived CPS as a response to children who have experienced trauma and pose challenging behaviors was explored.

Significance of the Study

As the study unfolded, the investigator gathered information to advance knowledge regarding staff perceptions of CPS. The researcher was able to explore growth in teacher capacity through the CPS model. Finally, the study examined teacher perceptions about the students engaged in the CPS process. The study explored whether CPS is a valid and reliable method for staff to support students who exhibit challenging behaviors.

The information gathered in the study could help inform schools and districts about improved methods for professional development around trauma-responsive approaches to supporting students with challenging behaviors, possibly resulting from trauma. The study could provide schools and districts with a tool to help staff members build capacity and support students in socioemotional skill growth. With positive results, CPS could become a program embedded into district professional development and implemented across the district, state, and even nation. The use of CPS could improve teacher practice and student achievement.

Research Questions

The research concentrated on teacher perceptions of CPS. The study examined teacher perceptions about the students engaged in the problem-solving process. The study explored staff members' experiences with learning the CPS process and how professional development affected

teacher capacity. The investigator applied a qualitative case study methodology to allow for a more in-depth analysis of teacher perceptions (Yin, 2011). The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What are staff perceptions of the collaborative problem-solving model?

Research Question 2: What are staff perceptions after learning and implementing the collaborative problem-solving process?

Research Question 3: How does collaborative problem solving impact students who have experienced childhood trauma?

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

The study was grounded in the servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977) and Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory. Servant leadership theory focuses on leaders serving others to build self-efficacy (Gandolfi., 2017; Grisaffe et al., 2016). Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides an understanding of meeting basic survival needs to reach higher self-attainment levels. Together these two theories connect to show, once adults support students' basic needs, the children and staff members begin to develop self-efficacy. The theories intersect to determine the effects of CPS on student socioemotional needs and on teacher perceptions of students, trauma, and staff member capacity. Based on these two theories, one can predict staff can support the development of a student's socioemotional skills by first meeting the child's basic needs. Through the support of basic needs, students may be more successful academically and behaviorally. The theories combine to show, by viewing students from a servant leadership perspective, staff can work to provide students' basic needs and create more opportunities for students to grow academically and emotionally.

Definitions of Terms

The key to comprehending the study is understanding several terms used throughout. The following terms are used throughout the study and could be subject to interpretation. The following definitions provide a common understanding of the applicability of the terms to the study.

Collaborative Problem Solving. A four-step process used by adults and students to solve problems in a collaborative setting. The four steps of the model include the ALSUP Step, the Empathy Step, the Define Adult Concerns Step, and the Invitation Step where the child is encouraged to join the adult in a problem-solving conversation (Greene, 2014; Greene & Winkler, 2019).

Complex Trauma. Not limited to a single event, complex trauma occurs when multiple incidents, ongoing threats, or chronic stress are involved (Brunzell et al., 2015; Day et al., 2017).

Lagging Skill. Lagging skill is a cognitive-behavioral deficit, or developmental delay, often manifesting in defiant, unmotivated, or manipulative behaviors (Stetson & Plog, 2016).

Staff Members. Staff members refer to any adult in the elementary school who have direct contact with students on a daily basis. This includes teachers, related service staff, paraprofessionals, teacher aides, and support staff.

Trauma. Trauma is a potentially dangerous or threatening perception of an experience leaving the victim with less capacity to cope (Gardner, 2019).

Trauma-Responsive. Trauma-responsive describes systems, programs, and practices that are not only informed about trauma but also are set up to treat all clientele as though trauma has been experienced at some point in the client's life (Herrenkohl et al., 2019).

Assumptions

Assumptions in research often identify what is believed (Davidson et al., 2017). Staff members were assumed to want to help students grow socioemotionally. Another assumption was the desire in staff members to grow professionally. Faculty were assumed to answer all interview and survey questions honestly. A targeted population is a group of people who are assumed to be interested in the study topic. Defining assumptions is central to transparency in research (Mir, 2018). Some of these assumptions were prevented by putting into place certain research delimitations.

Scope and Delimitations

The study had delimitations falling under the control of the researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The delimitations were put in place to ensure the investigation was as reliable and credible as possible. Subjects were chosen from a group of people who expressed interest in trauma-responsive practices and articulated a desire to support students with challenging behaviors, possibly occurring due to trauma exposure. Multiple data collection methods were used—semi-structured interviews, surveys, and document analysis—and the findings were triangulated for higher reliability. The interview questions were formulated to ensure the research questions were answered (Stake, 1995). Staff members were given the opportunity to opt out of answering any questions that created discomfort. Virtual interviews were conducted. The goal of the interview was clearly articulated by the interviewer. This procedure allowed the interviewer to gain an authentic understanding of teacher perspectives. Yin (2011) suggested, when conducting qualitative research, the investigator needs to be transparent throughout all phases of inquiry so the researcher does not exploit limitations to the study.

Transparency occurred through data collection by allowing participants to review the interview transcripts. Data were collected in a manner so others who review the study could

understand the process (Yin, 2011). Any emotional attachment during interviews was removed. Study subjects came from one location. Yin (2011) warned to only provide conclusions about a study directly referenced to the data collected. These processes lent transferability to the findings.

Limitations

The study possessed some limitations. Limitations are weaknesses falling outside the control of the researcher (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). Ethically sound research identifies potential limitations (Yin, 2011). The participants came from a single school in an urban school district in Illinois. The small geographic region may limit the global scope for responses (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The study results could be generalizable to educators who teach elementary school in an urban school district in Illinois.

Another limitation was time. The researcher conducted the study for over 10 months. A shorter time frame could limit the scope of research. Extended time could provide additional perspectives and opportunities to gain further insights into the staff members' views (Yin, 2011).

Participant honesty was a potential limitation. Although subjects had the opportunity to opt out of questions or the entire study, the possibility existed one or more participants may not have been entirely truthful. Pinsky (2015) found, when participants share the same values and beliefs as the interviewer, the participants are more willing to be honest and open.

The entire study occurred during the COVID-19 global pandemic. During this time, all student learning was conducted virtually. School staff taught from their homes during this pandemic causing all of the trainings, problem-solving sessions, and interviews to occur virtually.

Chapter Summary

A growing number of students who display challenging classroom behaviors meet school personnel daily. Research has determined teachers are ill equipped to support students who have problematic behaviors, often manifesting from traumatic childhood experiences (Day et al., 2017; Hambacher, 2018; Holmes et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016; Nadeem et al., 2011). These experiences diminish a child's ability to learn (Garner et al., 2015).

Using CPS, faculty and students engage in the collaborative practice for determining why students are not meeting expectations. Training in CPS could become standard practice for how staff members build relationships with students who have experienced trauma. The research could significantly impact students and teachers in the targeted population through the building of relationships. If successful, the results could be used district-wide as a model for how to support students who exhibit challenging behaviors.

The interviewer explored a series of research questions to determine staff perceptions of CPS, experiences with CPS, and any perceptions regarding students' changes during the CPS process. The study was grounded in servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977) and Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory. By viewing students from a servant leadership perspective, faculty can provide students' basic needs, creating more opportunities for students to grow academically and emotionally.

The study was not without assumptions, delimitations, and limitations. An assumption was the staff members would be compelled to support students and wish to do what best serves students. The faculty were assumed to be honest when answering interview and survey questions. Limitations included the restricted geographic area where the study took place, the study taking place during a global pandemic, and the amount of time the study spanned. Delimitations were put into place to ensure the research was as reliable and credible as possible.

The researcher chose subjects from a population of school staff who expressed interest in the topic. Interview responses, survey responses, and document review data were analyzed to triangulate results. The researcher thoroughly planned the interview questions and held interviews virtually. During the study, participants may have opted out of a single question or the study as a whole. These delimitations supported the authenticity of the review. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature regarding trauma-responsive practices in schools as well as research gaps.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

An emerging problem in education is educators do not believe school leaders have worked to build teacher capacity in helping students who have experienced trauma and display challenging behaviors in the classroom (Day et al., 2017; Hambacher, 2018; Holmes et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016; Nadeem et al., 2011). Garner et al. (2015) reported childhood experiences affect overall health and learning positively and negatively, depending on the occurrence. School staff assert a regular part of the day is spent addressing disruptive student behaviors (Blitz et al., 2016). Although staff members spend a portion of the instructional day dealing with challenging behaviors, teachers are ill equipped to support students (Hambacher, 2018). The lack of training presents an obstacle to improving student behaviors as well as student academics. With the right relationship in place, faculty can help students overcome the harmful effects of trauma (Willis & Nagel, 2015).

The concern then arises regarding what staff can do to be proactive with the challenging behaviors of students. The goal of the qualitative study was to assess teacher perceptions of a trauma-responsive model for solving problems in the classroom and other school settings. Using Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS), adults and students engaged in collaborative practice for solving the problems students display, through directly addressing the students' lagging skills. Training in the CPS model may become a foundation for how teachers begin to build relationships with students who have experienced trauma. Through an intersection of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory and servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977), teachers will build positive relationships and help students meet basic human needs to be more successful in the classroom. The literature review focuses on the growing rate of childhood trauma, the impact trauma has on children in classrooms, and how adults and schools can help diminish the effects

of trauma.

Literature Search Strategy

A literature search was conducted using several tools. The American College of Education library database was the primary source for searching articles and research. The investigator explored the Western Michigan University Library. The investigator searched databases such as EBSCOhost, ERIC, and ProQuest and discovered empirical and theoretical articles using several keywords. The search began using the keywords *trauma* and *adverse childhood experiences*. The investigator narrowed the search field and added keywords to focus on schools. *Trauma schools* and *adverse childhood experiences education* were searched. As the research continued, more keywords were added, such as *brain development and trauma*, *fight-flight trauma*, *teacher-student relationship*, *collaborative problem solving*, *trauma-informed schools*, *trauma-sensitive practices*, *effects of trauma*, and *challenging student's behavior*. To ascertain information regarding theories, the terms *servant leadership* and *Maslow's hierarchy of needs* were used.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher grounded the study with the servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977) and Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory. The two theories informed this study. Servant leadership theory focuses on leaders serving others to build self-efficacy (Gandolfi, 2017; Grisaffe et al., 2016). Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs provides an understanding of meeting basic survival needs to reach higher self-attainment levels. Together these two theories connect to show, once adults support students' basic needs, the children and school staff begin to develop self-efficacy. The theories intersect as the purpose of the study was to determine the effects of CPS regarding student socioemotional needs and teacher perceptions of students, trauma, and

teacher capacity. Based on these two theories, the researcher could make a prediction affirming students' socioemotional skills by first meeting the child's basic needs, which may allow students to be more successful academically and behaviorally.

Servant Leadership Theory

Servant leadership began in ancient times when governments felt the purpose was to lead and serve the people (Gandolfi, 2017). Multiple cultures, from the Bedouin-Arab culture to Chinese culture, established systems functioning under the principle that leaders would be in service to the people. Despite its origination in ancient times, Robert Greenleaf began to apply servant leadership ideas to organizations' current management. Greenleaf (1977) defined 10 personality traits servant leaders possess. These characteristics include the ability to listen, have empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, a focus on building capacity in people, and building culture and community (Crippen & Willows, 2019; Greenleaf, 1977). A servant leader seeks to reach goals by serving the people's needs before the organization's needs (Gandolfi, 2017; Grisaffe et al., 2016). The focus lies in collaborative and mutually serving relationships. In other words, instead of a top-down style of leadership, servant leadership demands teamwork and shared decision making (Crippen & Willows, 2019). Heyler and Martin (2018) and Crippen and Willows (2019) stated servant leaders tend to focus on how to grow capacity in the people through acceptance and empathy. Figure 1 depicts the leader at the bottom of the pyramid. The leader supports workers, and through the assistance given by the leader, the team can collaborate and reach goals. The figure illustrates what can be achieved based on a supportive leader who focuses on collaboration and trust.

Figure 1*Model of Servant Leadership***Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory**

Abraham Maslow (1943) created a theory based on human needs. The theory has been focused on psychological research since the early 1940s when first conceived (Gialamas & Pelonis, 2017). One of the critical factors in Maslow's hierarchy of needs is the idea both biological and psychological needs must be met to reach a level of self-actualization (Harrigan & Commons, 2015; Steenbakkens et al., 2018). Maslow organized the hierarchy of needs into five layers within a triangle. At the lowest and largest portion of the triangle, Maslow indicated physiological necessities, including the need for food, water, warmth, and sleep. In physiological conditions, homeostasis, or freedom from stress, is essential (Maslow, 1943). Individuals must meet these primary requirements before moving to the next level, which indicates a need for

safety and security (Maslow, 1943). This level includes feeling safe from physical harm as well as financial and employment security (Lonn & Dantzler, 2017). Moving up the triangle to the third level of love and belonging requires meeting the needs of the lower two levels first. Feeling a sense of belonging includes having friends, connections within the family, and emotional intimacy (Lonn & Dantzler, 2017). The fourth level of self-esteem is followed by the top level of self-actualization (Maslow, 1943; see Figure 2). Maslow's theory asserts basic physiological needs must be met before a human can understand and achieve one's potential.

Maslow explored how human motivation relates to achieving personal goals (Harrigan & Commons, 2015; Lonn & Dantzler, 2017). At the core of Maslow's theory is the concept of human nature desiring self-actualization, yet achieving one's potential cannot occur without the lower needs having been met (Gialamas & Pelonis, 2017). In other words, learning cannot happen if basic needs are not satisfied.

The Intersection of Servant Leadership and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

In the study, a collaborative and proactive solution model (Greene, 2014) may build relationships between adults and behaviorally challenging students and build on the primary need of homeostasis. *Homeostasis* refers to stability in the brain, despite external factors that may try to disrupt the system (Forbes, 2012). The collaborative and proactive solution model may teach students with lagging skills to help the children stay in homeostasis. A child in homeostasis could have a better chance of performing positively, both behaviorally and academically (Forbes, 2012). With faculty serving as the leaders of this process, educators may act as servant leaders, empowering students to achieve success behaviorally and academically. The theories combine to show, by viewing students from a servant leadership perspective, school staff could work to provide the basic needs of students, creating more opportunities for students to grow

academically and emotionally.

Figure 2

Model of Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs



Research Literature Review

Across the nation, trauma is evident. Defined in many ways, trauma lessens the victim's ability to cope in a healthy manner. Events involving abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction can lead to traumatic experiences (Terrasi & Galarce, 2017). Whether simple or complex, trauma can wreak havoc on the brain's ability to process appropriate responses. At the onset of a traumatic experience, the emotions trigger the brain into a fight, flight, or freeze mode (Gardner, 2019; Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). When fight, flight, or freeze occurs, the limbic system fires up and the frontal cortex disengages, causing the brain to make less logical decisions (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). A fight response may cause a child to lash out physically or verbally, become

defiant, or exhibit hyperactive behaviors. A flight response may cause a child to leave the classroom, sleep, zone out, or be truant from class or school. A freeze response may cause the child to simply shut down and become unresponsive (Gardner, 2019). With the increase in childhood trauma, school staff see this problem more frequently.

Between 2005 and 2015, the number of students who had experienced traumatic events prior to entering school increased by more than 50% (Holmes et al., 2015). All over the country, trauma is appearing in classrooms. Trauma does not discriminate by location, gender, or race. Students present challenging behaviors as a result of childhood trauma. Schools can support students with socioemotional needs due to exposure to trauma (Vona et al., 2018).

As first responders, school staff members have the opportunity to support students and eradicate the effects of trauma (Exner, 2017; Flower et al., 2015). Students reported supportive faculty resulted in higher success in school (Flower et al., 2015). Research suggests teachers are ill equipped to support students who have experienced trauma (Strom et al., 2016). Training is necessary to provide school staff with the knowledge required to understand the effects trauma has on the brain (Barr, 2018; Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). After receiving training, faculty members felt more confident about supporting students (Alisic, 2012; Vanderwegen, 2013). With strong servant leaders who understand the importance of meeting students' basic needs, this work could become a part of school professional development models.

Schools and districts can focus on training staff members in authentic relationship building and instruction strategies in socioemotional skills. Central to children's development is the need for supportive adults (Collins et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2018; Obsuth et al., 2017). Positive relationships are vital to fortifying the healing process (Brunzell et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016). Constructive and encouraging relationships build a sense of trust and

safekeeping in a child, required for repairing the damage incurred from trauma (McConnico et al., 2016). Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs becomes central to the recovery process.

Professional development curricula do not exist to educate staff members on how to form beneficial relationships with students. While relationships are central to support students with trauma, schools struggle to cultivate positive relationships between teachers and students.

Professional development often emphasizes the importance of teacher–student relationships.

Absent from the lessons are strategies for application (Cook et al., 2018).

Collaborative problem solving is a strategy which educators can learn. In this trauma-responsive method, adults build authentic relationships with students while facilitating growth in student socioemotional skills. The philosophy behind CPS states a child does well if equipped with the skills needed to obey the expected behavior, and without the capacity to perform the skill, students might not be successful (Greene & Winkler, 2019; Maddox et al., 2018).

In the CPS four-step model, adults determine the student's lagging skills, or behavioral deficit, inhibiting the ability to meet the expected behavior, and how the lack of capacity in a skill results in an unsolved problem (Greene & Winkler, 2019). Once discovered, a collaborative conversation with the student around the problem can occur. The student has the opportunity to share their perspective and why the expectation is challenging to meet. The adult then promotes empathy and understanding. Together, the two participants brainstorm solutions until a mutually agreed-upon solution is found (Stetson & Plog, 2016). This process strengthens relationships, teaches children skills, and supports the brain's development (Greene & Winkler, 2019).

The CPS process is a concrete program on which school professional development sessions can focus. The CPS process not only assists with strengthening relationships between adults and students but also works to close cognitive delays, often caused by trauma. With an

understanding of the effect trauma has on the brain, productive relationships have the power to diminish the damage inflicted by trauma (McConnico et al., 2016). The four-step CPS model addresses developmental deficits, and adults support students in learning skills to assist in closing the socioemotional gap (Greene & Winkler, 2019).

Trauma: A Problem

Experiences such as domestic violence, mental illness in the home, divorce, incarceration, and drugs in the home are considered traumatic events (Brunzell et al., 2015; Day et al., 2017). While other events occurring in one's life could also be considered traumatic, these experiences can be life-altering. In many cases, trauma causes the brain to react as if the incident is a threat (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). These traumatic reactions are becoming more common in children and often manifest as challenging behaviors.

What Is Trauma?

Trauma is defined as a potentially dangerous or threatening perception of an experience, causing fear or helplessness (Presidential Task Force on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Trauma in Children and Adolescents, 2008). Gardner (2019) added to the definition by concluding the effects of trauma leave the victim with less capacity to cope with the experience. When considering what types of incidents or events cause trauma, Terrasi and Galarce (2017) indicated three main categories of adverse childhood experiences: abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction. People can inflict abuse physically, emotionally, or sexually. A child who is neglected by a caretaker, either physically or emotionally, could suffer from trauma. Finally, domestic violence, mental illness in the home, substance abuse, divorce, incarceration, or chronic stress in the home could cause household dysfunction (Blitz et al., 2016; Garner et al., 2015; Herrenkohl, Hong, et al., 2019; Terrasi & Galarce, 2017). A child who experiences trauma

begins to believe the world is no longer a safe place (Brunzell et al., 2015).

Trauma can occur in a single event causing injury or harm, but trauma inflicted over time can also be hurtful (Blitz et al., 2016, Terrasi & Galarce, 2017). Over time, this complex trauma often occurs when multiple incidents, ongoing threats, or chronic stress are involved (Brunzell et al., 2015; Day et al., 2017). In instances of single-event trauma, the child is often not considered a factor in why the event took place. Consequently, the child is usually provided with immediate care to help with the trauma's effects (Brunzell et al., 2015).

In complex trauma, social shame is often involved. For example, if a caretaker chronically neglects a child at home, a parent would be less likely to share the information publicly, as opposed to if the child experienced a death in the family. When a child undergoes complex and ongoing trauma, the immediate response is not typically present (Brunzell et al., 2015). Trauma in the youngest populations appears to be growing at an alarming rate.

How the Brain Responds to Trauma

When a traumatic event occurs, the brain responds in fight, flight, or freeze mode (Gardner, 2019; Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). Fight, flight, or freeze responses kick in when the aroused brain's neural and hormonal systems are enacted and, together, prepare the body to respond to the given situation (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). When a traumatic experience occurs, the brain's frontal cortex, responsible for logical problem solving, is disabled, and the reptilian brain engages to allow the brain to focus on the situation (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). Once the frontal cortex is deactivated, the limbic system is stimulated, blood pressure and heart rate increase; the body will then prepare for a fight, flight, or freeze response (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). The brain loses sensations, such as pain and hunger (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). As the human brain is naturally wired for survival, preparing for fight, flight, or freeze is a natural

response when the brain perceives a threat (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). A brain exposed to chronic stress levels could suffer from disruptions in development, potentially causing a maladaptive alert system within the brain (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). The brain has neuroplasticity and can change as a result of experiences (Willis & Nagel, 2015). This means the brain can change over time as new neuron pathways are created, rewiring and reorganizing as it responds to different sensory experiences (Voss et al., 2017).

When fear is a factor, the response of fight, flight, or freeze can inhibit executive functioning (Frydman & Mayor, 2017). The human brain can respond to small moments of stress, but prolonged stressors may rewire the brain. During stress, excessive amounts of stress hormones release into the brain. Abnormally high levels of stress hormones are toxic to the brain and hinder development (Exner, 2017; Willis & Nagel, 2015). A brain, hyper-aroused over time, may undergo neurobiological changes (Terrasi & Galarce, 2017). A child with a chronically aroused brain could sense triggers even when there is no present threat (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). Once the brain senses danger, whether real or perceived, the brain becomes less logical in its ability to process and more reactive to what is perceived (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018).

Childhood Trauma Is a Growing Concern

People arbitrarily use the term *problematic behavior* to refer to actions outside of the social norm. Faculty report the most common inappropriate behaviors are noncompliance, insubordination, lack of engagement, and disruptions (Gage et al., 2018). A challenging student in a classroom is, likely, manifesting symptoms of trauma (Brunzell et al., 2015). Before entering kindergarten, approximately one out of every four children could experience a traumatic event, often an adverse childhood experience (McConnico et al., 2016). Stempel et al. (2017) stated 48% of school-age children have had a traumatic adverse childhood experience. Gardner (2019)

indicated more than 50% of students have experienced at least one traumatic or damaging event. In a study in which children self-reported traumatic experiences, the results revealed 78% of the children had been exposed to trauma, as opposed to only 66% of parents reporting the experiencing of a traumatic event (Holmes et al., 2015).

Trauma does not discriminate. Trauma occurs for children across the country (Holmes et al., 2015). For children who reside in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods or are in an ethnic minority, the risk for trauma increases (Barr, 2018; Herrenkohl, Hong, et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016). Poverty plays a role in lack of attachment, depression, and chronic stress (Collins et al., 2017). Children who have fewer advantages could experience complex trauma and, as a result, may struggle due to Maslow's (1943) basic needs not being met.

Trauma in Schools

Educators are confronted with students who have experienced trauma (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). These adverse experiences deprive many children of the ability to regulate behaviors (Brunzell et al., 2015). Faculty members have an opportunity to support students who have experienced trauma (Vona et al., 2018). Research states faculty who receive training in how to support students through trauma-responsiveness are more confident in helping students (Alisic, 2012; Vanderwegen, 2013).

How Trauma Manifests

Students who have experienced trauma may not be performing at the same rate as grade-level peers. According to Maslow (1943), children who do not feel safe and secure or have not had basic needs such as food, shelter, and sleep may struggle to learn. The consequences of a traumatic experience or multiple experiences can be long lasting, severe, and detrimental (Alisic,

2012; Garner et al., 2015). Typically, the immediate response to trauma could be a newfound sense of fear, difficulty concentrating, attempts to forget, and disinterest in everyday activities (Alisic, 2012; Gardner, 2019). Feeling fearful could become familiar for a victim of trauma (Gardner, 2019). In the event childhood adversity occurs, and the caretaking adult does not respond in a manner to create a safe and secure base for the child, further trauma occurs, and the child begins to detach from relationships (Pur, 2014; Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). The earlier trauma occurs in a child's life, the more likely the experience will have damaging effects on the child (Pur, 2014).

Childhood adverse experiences could also lead to posttraumatic stress disorder (Barr, 2018), which can create development problems, both emotionally and physically (Brunzell et al., 2015). The effects of trauma are not only visible, but neurological and physiological systems can also sustain long-term damage (Arincorayan et al., 2017; Brunzell et al., 2015). Dannehl et al. (2017) and McConnico et al. (2016) found a direct relationship between trauma and cognitive functioning, language, memory, and brain development. For children who have multiple or prolonged exposures to trauma, emotional regulation difficulties increase, ability to pay attention decreases, and impulse control is lacking (McConnico et al., 2016).

The effects of trauma linger in the classroom and appear in many different ways (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018; Stempel et al., 2017). For some children, trauma manifests as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Frydman & Mayor, 2017). In others, trauma can present as misconduct, oppositional defiance, or reactive attachment disorder (Holmes et al., 2015). Trauma could simply look like disinhibited social engagement and acute stress (Brunzell et al., 2015). Students who have experienced trauma often struggle academically (Gardner, 2019; Willis & Nagel, 2015). Children who have had adverse experiences are hard-wired to view the

world in a more negative way (McConnico et al., 2016).

A level of distrust in people and environment could manifest, leading to trouble forming relationships, having empathy, or understanding verbal and nonverbal cues (Gardner, 2019; Herrenkohl, Hong, et al., 2019; McConnico et al., 2016). Students who have experienced trauma are less likely to form relationships with classroom staff members (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). Absenteeism from school becomes more likely when a student has experienced trauma (Crouch et al., 2019; Exner, 2017; Gardner, 2019; Stempel et al., 2017). Regardless of how trauma occurs, trauma may manifest in learning (John, 2016). Willis and Nagel (2015) went so far as to proclaim trauma outmaneuvers learning. Along with academic struggles, students who have experienced trauma tend to have more behavior problems and inappropriate responses to stimuli. The research concludes trauma can impact a child's ability to learn, form healthy relationships, and follow basic classroom and school expectations (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2008).

A triggered child might tap into a fight, flight, or freeze mode (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). Fight, flight or freeze responses could cause a variety of behaviors in a child ranging from external verbal or physical behaviors to internal and unresponsive actions (Gardner, 2019). These challenging behaviors can become problematic in the classroom.

How Schools Can Help

Schools are the prime location for students to receive childhood trauma support as this setting offers mental health services (Vona et al., 2018). A child is more likely to have consistent care in a school setting than in the community where the services may be more limited (Vona et al., 2018). Families often cannot provide consistent mental health care to children (Brunzell et al., 2015). While no one can mandate a child receive mental health services outside of school,

laws require students to attend school. Knowing schools have unconditional access to children inflicted by trauma, schools could logically put supports in place to support students influenced by adverse experiences (Brunzell et al., 2015; Exner, 2017). In schools, educators engage in conversations with families to learn more about any trauma inflicted on the children (Crouch et al., 2019). Not only can these conversations provide information about past trauma, which can be supported, but the discussions can also lead to proactive conversations to mitigate future exposure to trauma (Crouch et al., 2019; Frydman & Mayor, 2017).

Schools are often the safest place for students, and the school personnel are often the only adults whom children can trust (Exner, 2017). Conventional school systems have been structured in such a way to focus only on academic needs. Now staff members and school leaders are more knowledgeable about childhood trauma, and an opportunity exists to rebuild the system to support social and emotional needs (Frydman & Mayor, 2017; McConnico et al., 2016; Vona et al., 2018). For children who struggle with the effects of trauma, interventions are needed to help bridge the emotional gap students struggle with to improve classroom performance (Crouch et al., 2019; McConnico et al., 2016; Pur, 2014).

Many methods of approaching students who have experienced trauma are reactive, but with early intervention, schools can be proactive in reducing the effects of trauma on children (Arincorayan et al., 2017). One difficulty is in creating a model of trauma-informed support to use universally across a school while simultaneously meeting the needs of individual students who have had exposure to trauma (Holmes et al., 2015). Herrenkohl, Hong, et al. (2019) asserted, while school-wide systems are essential, small-group or individual approaches are more likely to yield improved results. Kendziora and Osher (2016) found socioemotional instruction in schools is beneficial. Programs such as Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) have

positively affected schools' behaviors (Yeung et al., 2015). Improvements in behaviors are more likely to occur when the school's administrators support the PBIS program (Yeung et al., 2015). Effective teaching needs to address the basic needs before expecting a child to learn in the classroom (Brunzell et al., 2015). Pur (2014) asserted the need for student programs focusing on specific skills, such as emotional regulation. The pressure to support students exposed to trauma weighs heavily on the school system (Willis & Nagel, 2015).

Teachers Play a Part

When students attend school, teachers are on the front lines in every classroom (Brunzell et al., 2015). As a result, teachers could have a great deal of influence and impact on students, both positively and negatively (Barr, 2018; Obsuth et al., 2017). Teachers hold great power to support students' self-awareness and understanding of the environment (Exner, 2017; Flower et al., 2015). Often, students from disadvantaged economic neighborhoods are stereotyped by teachers, resulting in a higher level of exclusionary disciplinary practices (Hambacher, 2018). New methods are beginning to emerge wherein schools are moving away from exclusionary measures toward using relationships to build socioemotional capacity in students (Anyon et al., 2018). For teachers who take a different perspective and see disadvantaged students as children needing additional skills, much success has been revealed (Hambacher, 2018). Teachers play a crucial role in rehabilitating students who have experienced trauma (John, 2016; Willis & Nagel, 2015). Teachers can regenerate a child's brain wiring and assist in the recovery from traumatic experiences (Alisic, 2012).

Students' Perspectives of Teachers

In a study conducted by Flower et al. (2015), students who had experienced trauma felt deeply motivated to succeed by inspirational teachers. Day et al. (2017) found students enjoyed

being around school leaders who were positive and supportive. Students reported appreciating teachers who took the time to ask how the child's day was going or if the student needed any supports (Day et al., 2017). The same students noted a negative or unsupportive teacher had a detrimental effect on the well-being and desire to perform well in school (Day et al., 2017). In the same study, many students discussed the importance of having basic needs met, for example, students verbalized the need for nutrition and proper meals to stay calm and learn (Day et al., 2017). Parallel to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, primary fundamental physiological conditions come first. John (2016) indicated the teacher's crucial role in learning about students' life experiences to support the learning process.

Students reported teachers have the ability to support successful life outcomes (Flower et al., 2015). Teachers who recognize students' needs and provide individualized supports support student growth (Day et al., 2017; Flower et al., 2015). Students reported the need for instruction in social skills is equally essential as academic skills, and the students saw these skills as necessary for long-term success in life (Flower et al., 2015).

Teachers' Perspectives of Students Who Have Experienced Trauma

Not all teachers understand the effects trauma has on a child's ability to succeed in school (Alisic, 2012; Exner, 2017; Vona et al., 2018). Research on teacher perspectives of children who have experienced trauma is limited (Alisic, 2012). For the teachers who understand the need for trauma-responsive practices, school personnel are ill equipped to support students who exhibit challenging behaviors due to trauma (Blitz et al., 2016). Teachers are unsure of what to do to help students (Strom et al., 2016). Many teachers find the relationships between educators and students who exhibit challenging behaviors are often more demanding and more conflicting (Barr, 2018). Although teachers often engage in professional development, knowledge about

childhood trauma and how to support students is often absent (McConnico et al., 2016).

Research suggests teachers need an alternative approach if supporting socioemotional needs rests in the teachers' hands (McConnico et al., 2016). Teachers struggle to understand where the roles of academic instructor and social worker or psychologist coexist in a classroom (Alisic, 2012). Some teachers believe socioemotional learning resides with trained professionals in such areas (Alisic, 2012). Teachers report training is necessary to support children who have experienced trauma (Alisic, 2012).

Training Is Needed

To better understand the effects trauma has on a child's brain and a student's ability to learn, faculty need professional development (Barr, 2018; Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). Without training, staff members would likely mistake simple or complex trauma symptoms with insubordination, defiance, lack of attention, or general misbehavior (Barr, 2018). Understanding the brain's makeup, specifically the functions of each part of the brain and how different components are activated, is essential in understanding how a child responds when regulated or dysregulated (Barr, 2018). Vanderwegen (2013) and Alisic (2012) determined teachers, when adequately trained, had an increased comfort level dealing with students who had experienced trauma. Without training, educators felt burdened and emotionally unprepared to handle the stressors of socioemotional interventions. Resources and time are necessary to train staff members in the knowledge and application of trauma-informed practices (Vona et al., 2018). Statman-Weil (2015) explored the need for trauma-sensitive instructional practices. Day et al. (2017) and Flower et al. (2015) determined children could succeed, despite having experienced trauma, with the right adult supports in place.

Relationships Matter

Supporting students in repairing trauma can be accomplished through relationship building (Obsuth et al., 2017). Relationships that support the victims of trauma can help in the healing process (McConnico et al., 2016). While negative staff–student relationships can yield negative effects, positive relationships between staff members and students can build skills in both parties (Archambault et al., 2017; Greene & Winkler, 2019).

Why Relationships Are Central

Along with building teacher capacity to recognize the effects of trauma, understanding the importance of relationships is also vital. Brain development research states positive social relationships are fundamental to appropriate brain development and repair (Cook et al., 2018). Supportive adults are central to children’s social, behavioral, and emotional development (Collins et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2018; Obsuth et al., 2017). Through relationships, students learn self-regulation, emotional stability, and the ability to process social communication (Collins et al., 2017).

Positive Teacher–Student Relationships

Adults can build resilience in children through positive and supportive relationships and can lessen the effects of trauma (Arincorayan et al., 2017; McConnico et al., 2016). Educators who listen, mentor, and use fair practices foster supportive relationships with students (Gardner, 2019). Closeness, caring, positive interactions, and an absence of conflict and anger characterize a healthy relationship (Collins et al., 2017). Quality teacher–student relationships lead to positive changes in students (Willis & Nagel, 2015). Teachers have reported a commitment to education due to the relationships formed with students (Claessens et al., 2017). Educators also report more fruitful problem solving occurs during times of conflict when a positive and supportive staff–student relationship is present (Anyon et al., 2018).

Central to the healing process from trauma are relationships to support the victim (Brunzell et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016). Positive and supportive relationships provide a sense of trust and safekeeping, necessary for healing from trauma (McConnico et al., 2016). Healthy relationships with staff members allow students to engage in interactions to support healthy adult relationships (McConnico et al., 2016).

Through positive relationships, adults build student self-image, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Willis & Nagel, 2015). Children who are engaged in positive relationships with school staff have a sense of inclusion. The students have a sense of belonging, building on Maslow's (1943) foundational needs before self-actualization and accessing learning (Kern et al., 2019; Obsuth et al., 2017). Students connected to the school and school personnel show higher academic achievement (Cook et al., 2018; Kern et al., 2019; Masko, 2018). In classrooms in which encouraging teacher–student relationships are present, behavioral outcomes are more favorable (Pham et al., 2018; Poulou, 2017).

Obsuth et al. (2017) asserted the student's perspective on the teacher–student relationship is more important than the teacher's viewpoint. Cook et al. (2018) corroborated this finding. This belief could be due to relationships not being solely about the exchanges between two people but the perceptions and core opinions the participants have about one another (Cook et al., 2018). Students who believe in positive relationships with school staff members displayed more prosocial behaviors and less aggressive behaviors (Anyon et al., 2018; Obsuth et al., 2017). Obsuth et al. attributed this finding to having an adult assist with problem solving instead of relying on underdeveloped skills and antisocial behaviors. The effects of a relationship with a school staff member wherein the child feels supported can last over several years (Obsuth et al., 2017). Research has shown gender and race are not indicators of a more or less positive

relationship (Kern et al., 2019).

To promote positive staff–student relationships, adults interact with students to promote safety, security, and understanding (Obsuth et al., 2017). Meeting Maslow’s (1943) foundational needs is necessary for a student to overcome the effects of trauma on the brain. Research indicates supportive staff–student relationships can teach students with behavior problems how to engage in healthy and protective relationships (Cook et al., 2018). While teachers believe positive relationships are best practice, few make an intentional effort to foster relationships or restore relationships when the interaction is damaged (Cook et al., 2018). Cook et al. (2018) asserted, due to minority students having less supportive relationships in schools than White peers, staff can mitigate the achievement–opportunity gap with more robust relationships between minority students and staff. Minority students often report lacking a sense of safety, leading to more urgent and imperative needs for relationship building (Anyon et al., 2018).

While some professional development focuses on the importance of staff–student relationships, few learning sessions present ways for teachers to learn strategies, nor do the lessons provide opportunities for teachers to apply the learning (Cook et al., 2018). Teachers need time to practice, with support, what is learned in professional development sessions. With a structured approach to learning strategies for relationship building, a positive change in staff–student interactions can occur (Cook et al., 2018).

Negative Teacher–Student Relationships

Negative teacher–student relationships can present risks and harm student growth and achievement (Day et al., 2017). Students are less likely to engage in learning without a positive relationship with the teacher (Archambault et al., 2017). For students who often find conflict with adults, prosocial behaviors decrease, adversely affecting the child’s ability to foster other

positive relationships (Archambault et al., 2017). In the end, a child is less likely to respond positively to school if negative relationships are present (Archambault et al., 2017).

Challenges to Relationship Building

Some school staff members may find relationship building with students to be complicated. Homrich-Knieling (2019) discovered a problem when teachers attempted to exert only power and control over the students. When power is the adult's primary focus, the relationship becomes insincere and lacks depth (Homrich-Knieling, 2019). An understanding of race and culture needs to be present in order to form quality relationships. For a staff member with deeply embedded biases or prejudices, relationship building could be more difficult. Faculty who do not understand racial and cultural differences may be less likely to form relationships with students of different ethnic backgrounds (Blitz et al., 2016). No curriculum or professional development package exists to instruct school staff members to have meaningful relationships with students, presenting another challenge (Homrich-Knieling, 2019).

Collaborative Problem Solving

Although no curriculum is available to instruct faculty on building strong and positive relationships with students to ease the effects of trauma, tools are available to foster relationships naturally. Collaborative problem solving is one tool. Collaborative problem solving allows a teacher and the student to solve problems to support both parties.

Philosophy Behind Collaborative Problem Solving

The guiding principle of CPS states students will perform well if the children have the skills to do so (Greene & Winkler, 2019). Collaborative problem-solving focuses on providing students with socioemotional learning, which could empower the students to solve future problems on their own (Kendziora & Osher, 2016). Based on the lagging skills a child exhibits

and the child's developmental stage, any of the following dimensions could be a focus: social abilities, attachment, emotional skill, self-perception, and emotional recognition and management. The underlying belief in CPS indicates a child is not equipped with the skills necessary to adhere to the expected behavior (Greene & Winkler, 2019; Maddox et al., 2018). Through a collaborative process, adults and students may build mutually supportive relationships. Socioemotional skill building could also occur in students, increasing the child's capacity to fill gaps in socioemotional development.

Cognitive Deficits

When children lack skills in academics, interventions are typically put in place to support the learning gap. The same is not true for lagging behavioral skills. Often, children are viewed as discipline-deficient, unmotivated, or even manipulative (Stetson & Plog, 2016). Further research or questioning could reveal if the student lacks the ability or knowledge of a behavioral skill (Stetson & Plog, 2016). A child with a deficit in a cognitive lagging skill needs support by adults through the teaching of the missing skill in order for success to occur (Stetson & Plog, 2016). Students raised in poverty run a greater risk of exhibiting developmental cognitive delays (Barr, 2018). Success has been achieved in closing socioemotional cognitive deficits by disseminating socioemotional programming in schools (Barr, 2018).

Components of Collaborative Problem Solving

The CPS approach is broken down into four components: an assessment of lagging skills and unsolved problems, an empathic response, identification of the adult's concern, and a CPS conversation between the teacher and the student (Greene & Winkler, 2019). Focused on relationship building through trusting and collaborative conversations, the model provides opportunities for working together and addressing lagging skills. Ideally, the problem would be

solved proactively by sharing ideas (Care & Griffin, 2014). Skill deficits in the CPS process equate to developmental delays (Stetson & Plog, 2016).

Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems. Before any collaboration can occur, the teacher needs to first determine the child's deficient skills. Typical areas of concern involve executive functioning skills, verbal and nonverbal communication skills, emotional recognition and management, time management, memory, attention, language, and adaptability (Ollendick et al., 2016; Stetson & Plog, 2016). Within each of these areas, specific skills exist. An example of a lagging skill is difficulty empathizing with others or appreciating an alternative viewpoint. The assessment of lagging skills allows the adult to move away from the blatant misbehavior and focus on what might be causing the inappropriate response (Greene & Winkler, 2019). Once the adult identifies the lagging skills, the adult can hone in to how the lagging skill presents itself in problematic behaviors. This behavior is then the focus of the collaborative conversation with the teacher (Stetson & Plog, 2016).

Empathy Step and Adult Concern Step. Two steps of the CPS process are the empathy step and the defining adult concerns step (Greene & Winkler, 2019). In the empathy step, the adult meets with the student and presents the student with what is perceived to be the problem behavior. The adult explicitly states the behavior of the student, for example, "I have noticed you have been having difficulty when Tyler has a different idea than you do." The adult allows the child to respond to the problem behavior. The goal is for the teacher, or adult, to understand the child's perspective of the issue (Greene & Winkler, 2019; Stetson & Plog, 2016). The key to understanding the child's viewpoint is understanding what challenges the student faces in adhering to the expectation (Greene & Winkler, 2019).

When the teacher can accurately rephrase the child's perspective about why the

expectation is challenging, the adult moves to the next step; when defining the teacher's concern, the adult must place importance on phrasing the matter to describe the effect the issue has on the child or others (Greene & Winkler, 2019). The teacher can then explain the adult perspective on the same problem to the child (Stetson & Plog, 2016). The teacher might say, "My concern is, when you tell Tyler to 'shut up,' you might hurt his feelings and bother other people in the class." The language is proactive and nonaccusatory (Greene & Winkler, 2019).

Invitation Step. Next, the teacher and the student engage in a conversation to mutually solve the problem. Collaborative problem solving sends the message to the child conveying problems. Sometimes the lesson is difficult for one person to solve, and seeking assistance is necessary (Care & Griffin, 2014). Brainstorming potential solutions then occurs. Ultimately, this step's outcome will land on a mutually agreed-upon solution to solve the child's and the adult's concern (Stetson & Plog, 2016).

Benefits of Collaborative Problem Solving

As a result of a shared conversation, instead of doling out punitive consequences, students better understand the teacher's perspective (Greene & Winkler, 2019). In a study of CPS effectiveness, Stetson and Plog (2016) discovered skill deficit gaps narrowed, students reduced insubordinate behaviors, and students demonstrated more significant self-regulation levels. In the same study, problem behaviors exhibited by students decreased (Stetson & Plog, 2016). Through CPS, students could build genuine and authentic relationships with school staff. The presence of a relationship may help support the fundamental needs as defined by Maslow (1943). Through the adoption of a trauma-informed method, student success could increase (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018).

Counterargument

Some may believe students who have experienced trauma are unreachable. School staff may report, despite training, a continued lack of the necessary skills to counsel students. Staff may report dealing with socioemotional issues is not a problem which teachers are required to solve. Faculty may believe the focus in the classroom is solely academic (Alisic, 2012). Another argument against the effectiveness of CPS and relationship building as a means to support students who have experienced trauma would be that research has shown teacher–student conflict does not affect behavioral engagement, only emotional engagement (Archambault et al., 2017). Academic engagement may be a better indicator of student achievement than teacher–student relationships (Cook et al., 2018).

Gaps exist in the research. While some researchers have conducted studies to determine the effects of the CPS model, absent are the perspectives of teachers who are engaged in the process. Another gap in research exists regarding school staff members' training in strategies leading to relationship building and repair (Cook et al., 2018). Absent from research and literature is an examination of how collaborative practices prevent or reduce the impact of trauma on children (Crouch et al., 2019). More research is needed to understand how to develop and implement trauma-responsive practices in schools (Herrenkohl, Hong, et al., 2019). Also missing from the literature are staff members' perspectives on the personal capacity to support students when trained in a model focused on building relationships and addressing students' lagging skills.

Chapter Summary

A dangerous or threatening experience causing fear or inability to cope constitutes trauma (Gardner, 2019; Presidential Task Force on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Trauma in Children and Adolescents, 2008). Trauma can occur in a single event or over time and typically

involves abuse, neglect, and dysfunction in the home (Blitz et al., 2016; Brunzell et al., 2015; Garner et al., 2015; Herrenkohl, Hong, et al., 2019; Terrasi & Galarce, 2017). For a child, trauma creates a sense of fear, and the child begins to believe the world is unsafe (Brunzell et al., 2015). Challenges arise considering how the brain responds to traumatic triggers.

When trauma triggers the brain, the response is either fight, flight, or freeze (Gardner, 2019; Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). Rosenbaum-Nordoft (2018) explained how the parts of the brain work together to respond in such a way to survive. The brain's frontal cortex, responsible for logical problem solving, is disabled, and the reptilian brain engages to allow the brain to focus on the situation (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). A brain exposed to chronic stress levels will be exposed to toxic levels of stress hormones and will suffer from disruptions in the brain's development, potentially causing a maladaptive alert system (Exner, 2017; Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). Chronic stress levels can cause a person to perceive a threat, even when one is not present (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018).

The number of children exposed to trauma is growing at an alarming rate. While in 2008, an estimated quarter of children had experienced trauma, the percentage in 2015 was closer to three quarters (Holmes et al., 2015). As a result of trauma and cognitive deficits in students, faculty members are experiencing an increasing number of students who present challenging behaviors (Hambacher, 2018). For students who live in economically deprived neighborhoods or are minorities, the risk for trauma increases (Barr, 2018; Herrenkohl, Hong, et al., 2019; Holmes et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016). As a result, children with fewer privileges are more likely to experience complex trauma and may struggle due to basic needs not being met (Maslow, 1943).

According to Maslow (1943), children who do not feel safe and secure or have not met

basic needs such as food, shelter, and sleep may struggle to learn. Living in a state of fear and unknowing becomes commonplace for a victim of trauma (Gardner, 2019). Detachment from relationships can occur if a child's caretaker does not respond appropriately to the traumatic event (Pur, 2014; Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). A direct relationship exists between trauma and cognitive functioning, language, memory, and brain development (Dannehl et al., 2017; McConnico et al., 2016). Emotional regulation difficulties, difficulties paying attention, and lack of impulse control appear more often in students who have experienced trauma (McConnico et al., 2016). Trouble forming relationships, having empathy, or understanding verbal and nonverbal cues is often exacerbated for students who have had adverse experiences (Gardner, 2019; Herrenkohl, Hong, et al., 2019; McConnico et al., 2016). Trauma begins to overtake a child's ability to learn (Willis & Nagel, 2015).

Schools are in a prime position to support children who have experienced trauma (Brunzell et al., 2015; Vona et al., 2018). Opportunities exist to learn from children and families about how trauma has affected lives (Crouch et al., 2019). Schools provide a safe place where students can form trusting relationships with school personnel (Exner, 2017). Emerging knowledge about the effects of childhood trauma provides an opening for school staff to support students' socioemotional deficits (Frydman & Mayor, 2017; McConnico et al., 2016; Vona et al., 2018).

The first responders to classroom symptoms of trauma are school staff members (Brunzell et al., 2015). Educators can have a long-lasting impact on a child (Barr, 2018; Obsuth et al., 2017). Rehabilitation from trauma can be supported and strengthened by teachers (John, 2016; Willis & Nagel, 2015). Due to the brain's neuroplasticity, school staff have the power to help regenerate a child's brain wiring while assisting in the recovery from traumatic experiences

(Alisic, 2012).

Staff perspectives of trauma-exposed children are limited (Alisic, 2012). Research suggests staff members who are aware of the need to support student socioemotional delays are ill equipped to do so (Blitz et al., 2016; Strom et al., 2016). Educators struggle to balance the need for instruction and academics (Alisic, 2012). Training is necessary to build staff member competency in supporting students who have experienced trauma (Alisic, 2012).

Understanding the brain's composition and function is essential in understanding how a child responds when regulated or dysregulated (Barr, 2018). Vanderwegen (2013) and Alisic (2012) found an increased comfort level for teachers when dealing with challenging students, provided the staff received training in such methods. Statman-Weil (2015) and Day et al. (2017) explored the need for trauma-sensitive practices. Flower et al. (2015) determined, with the right adults in place, all children could succeed.

Supportive adults are central to children's development (Collins et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2018; Obsuth et al., 2017). Relationships teach self-regulation, emotional stability, and the ability to process social communication (Collins et al., 2017). The effects of trauma can lessen by strengthening resilience in children through positive and supportive relationships (Arincorayan et al., 2017; McConnico et al., 2016). Professional development often focuses on the importance of teacher-student relationships. What becomes problematic is few professional developments present ways for adults to learn strategies, nor do the lessons provide opportunities for staff to apply the learning (Cook et al., 2018). With a structured approach to learning strategies for relationship building, a positive change in staff-student interactions can occur (Cook et al., 2018).

Educators can be trained in CPS, a trauma-responsive method to build relationships

between adults and students (Greene & Winkler, 2019). Using the guiding philosophy indicating children do well if the children know how to, the method works for addressing students' lagging socioemotional skills (Greene & Winkler, 2019; Maddox et al., 2018). Throughout the CPS process, the student and adult find solutions to solve both the child's and the adult's problems (Stetson & Plog, 2016). The process serves students by building relationships and closing cognitive delays, lessening the effects of trauma.

Gaps in the literature exist regarding teacher training in trauma-responsive practices (Cook et al., 2018). Also missing in research is whether CPS positively affects students who have experienced trauma (Crouch et al., 2019). Research is required to determine how to implement trauma-responsive systems in schools (Herrenkohl, Hong, et al., 2019). Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology, research design and rationale, research procedures, and data analysis for the study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The qualitative case study explored teacher perceptions of a trauma-responsive problem-solving method. The problem emerging in education is a lack of training to build teacher capacity in assisting students with behavior issues, commonly stemming from childhood trauma (Day et al., 2017; Hambacher, 2018; Holmes et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016; Nadeem et al., 2011). Staff members need training in methods to assist students with challenging behaviors, mainly when the educator is aware of a child's traumatic history.

The research focused on teacher perceptions of Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) as a response to supporting students who have experienced trauma. The study examined teacher perceptions of the problem-solving process. The study explored staff members' experiences with learning the CPS process and how the professional development affected teacher capacity. This study used a qualitative case study methodology to allow the interviewer to conduct a more in-depth study of teacher perceptions (Yin, 2011). The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What are staff perceptions of the collaborative problem-solving model?

Research Question 2: What are staff perceptions after learning and implementing the collaborative problem-solving process?

Research Question 3: How does collaborative problem solving impact students who have experienced childhood trauma?

In Chapter 3, the research design and rationale are explored. The section addresses the role of the researcher. Research procedures, including the population, sample, methods for participation, instrumentation, data collection, and data preparation, are examined. Finally, an

outline of the data analysis methods is shared. Protocols for ensuring reliability, validity, and ethical research are provided.

Research Design and Rationale

The qualitative study was designed to determine if the CPS process improves teacher capacity in supporting students who have experienced trauma and demonstrate challenging behaviors. The study sought to ascertain if training in the CPS process alters teacher perceptions regarding the capacity to aid students with behavioral challenges. The qualitative study methodology analyzes real-world scenarios and attempts to interpret the human perspective (Yin, 2011). This instrumental case study gives information about the specific situations encountered in the population studied and provides information for different populations (Stake, 1995). A constructivist view allowed the researcher to develop meanings by analyzing individual experiences (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative measures would not have been appropriate for this study due to the nature of the results. The study did not seek conclusive evidence, yet sought to understand and develop meaning from the collected data (Mayer, 2015). The case study design allowed the researcher to study several varying situations in multiple classrooms. The goal was to gather information from the data to inform and not determine proof of a phenomenon, so a phenomenology study was not appropriate. Equally inappropriate would have been a study in ethnography as this method studies groups in a natural setting over an extended time (Creswell, 2014). In this case, the study data spanned 10 months.

Role of the Researcher

For this study, my role was to serve as the researcher by interviewing the sample population. An analysis of anecdotal notes and the documents from the professional development process occurred. Despite my being a teacher colleague of the participants, no conflict of interest

was present nor incentives offered. Due to the nature of the peer-to-peer colleague relationship, I had no level of authority over the participants. The study took place in an urban elementary school in Illinois. To ensure the reliability of the data, participants reviewed the transcripts and results. MAXQDA assisted in the analysis of the data. The data coding allowed for a more in-depth analysis of the data (Yin, 2011). The analysis sought to define descriptions of the individuals and identify themes (Creswell, 2014). This analysis served to ensure the validity of interpretations and conclusions. There was no bias about what the results would garner. The study sought to provide information about the usefulness of the program.

Research Procedures

The qualitative instrumental case study took place in an elementary school. The school was located in an urban school district in Illinois. The qualitative case study's focus was to determine teacher perceptions of a specific trauma-responsive approach to problem solving in the classroom.

Population and Sample Selection

The target population was 15 Grade K–5 staff members in an urban elementary school in Illinois. A purposive sampling allowed for the opportunity to gain insights from people with direct experience in the topic (Ames et al., 2019). Participants were invited to contribute to the study (see Appendix A). All certified teachers, paraprofessionals, and support staff (e.g., speech and language therapist, occupational therapist) received an invitation to participate. The purpose of inviting all staff members who interact with students was to gain a broader perspective of the problem-solving model (Yin, 2011). The custodian, office staff, and lunch supervisors were not invited to participate as these staff members do not have regular interactions with students for prolonged periods. The researcher made every effort to include representation from staff

members in all six grade levels by extending invitations to all staff members who met the criteria.

The researcher requested site permission before recruiting any participants (see Appendix B). Permission to conduct research was obtained from the site administrator (see Appendix C). Staff received the invitation (see Appendix A) via email. Participants identified an interest in learning the CPS process. Participants needed to identify a student or students with whom to use the process. Staff members needed to possess knowledge of the child having experienced one or more traumatic events. All interested staff members participated in the study. Once the staff members agreed to participate, all communications took place via personal emails and personal cell phones, and never on school-issued email addresses or phones. Faculty who agreed to participate in the research study received a document outlining the study's aim and the nature of the research (Yin, 2011). Informed consent forms specified the study's activities (interviews, questionnaires, document review), eligibility, risks and benefits, confidentiality information, a voluntary participation clause, information about audio recording, and an opt-out clause (see Appendix D).

All anecdotal notes, questionnaires, interview transcripts, and documents included pseudonyms for participants to ensure confidentiality. Informed consent explained the use of pseudonyms (Stake, 1995). Informed consent forms were emailed to the participants, who returned the forms via email to the researcher. Collected data will be stored on a password-protected computer for 5 years following completion of the study (Creswell, 2014). After 5 years, all records will be destroyed. Participants had the opportunity to opt out of the research at any point, in compliance with the opt-out clause.

Instrumentation

Participants selected for the study engaged in an interview before being trained in CPS. As interview questions specific to this topic were nonexistent, researcher-created interview questions were developed and modeled after Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy's (2001) Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale. Questions were sent to five subject matter experts for review and feedback. The feedback helped to fine-tune the interview questions (see Appendix D). The subject matter experts comprised licensed social workers, a school psychologist, a behavior specialist and coach, a school counselor, the author of a book on trauma-sensitive practices in schools, and a certified trainer in CPS. The investigator used semi-structured interview questions to seek answers for the study (Appendix E).

The investigator established a plan for interviews (Stake, 1995). Interviews occurred in two junctures throughout the research cycle. The interviews took place in real-life settings and focused on the actual role staff members play in children's lives (Yin, 2011). The first interviews were piloted at the start of the process to determine a baseline for teacher perceptions. Seven months into the process, participants met with the interviewer again to determine if any perceptions had changed due to the training. The investigator led the interview in a virtual platform agreed on by both parties. Virtual interviews were audio and video recorded for transcription. Twice during the research, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that sought answers to questions similar to the interview questions. The researcher created the questionnaire after the interview questions were vetted (see Appendix F). For triangulation, data, documents, and anecdotal notes from the CPS process were analyzed for trends.

Through the responses to semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, coded data determined themes. An analysis of the documents used during the CPS process examined trends. These three data collection methods—interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis—

allowed for a comprehensive view of teacher perceptions of the CPS process related to students having experienced trauma and presenting challenging classroom behaviors. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to elaborate on any statements made to paint a full picture of perceptions (Brown & Danaher, 2019). The questionnaire allowed participants to answer in a non-face-to-face manner, allowing for more transparency. Finally, the analysis of documents from the CPS process completed the picture, enabling the study to unveil the stages of the process as the implementation of CPS happened.

Data Collection

A semi-structured interview tool helped to determine the staff members' perceptions. The semi-structured method allowed the interviewer to respond to nuances that may have arisen in the participant's answers (Brown & Danaher, 2019). A semi-structured interview is less of a data collection tool and more a way to understand the human perspective (Brown & Danaher, 2019). Staff members participated in an interview before receiving any training on the CPS model. Dates of interviews as well as training were maintained. The virtual interviews lasted less than 1 hour. The GoToMeeting platform audio and video recorded all sessions. The investigator posed the same interview questions to the participants 7 months after implementing the CPS process. All participants agreed to be interviewed virtually. At no time did interviews take place during instructional time. Each time an interview began, the investigator reminded the staff member of the goal of the study. The interviewer informed the participant of the semi-structured approach to allow both the participant and the researcher an opportunity to have an inquiry-based conversation (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Interviewees received confirmation of the ability to opt out of questions that may cause discomfort, and had a participant wished to discontinue the interview, the conversation would have been terminated. Before asking questions, the

investigator told the participant the interview would be audio and video recorded and received verbal consent on tape.

Following the interviews, participants received a Google Form questionnaire, which asked questions similar to the interview questions. Participants completed the questionnaire within 72 hours of receipt. The researcher used pseudonyms to protect confidentiality (Yin, 2011). The researcher entered data into a spreadsheet that will be stored on a password-protected computer for 5 years following the study's conclusion (Creswell, 2014). Participants had access to individualized responses if requested.

The investigator took notes on the CPS forms (Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems and Plan B Notetaking Form). Each participating staff member received copies of all documents from the CPS process. The investigator replaced all staff members' names with pseudonyms (Yin, 2011).

Following the interviews, recordings were uploaded onto a secure, password-protected computer within 24 hours. The researcher transcribed recordings using Microsoft Word within seven days and stored the transcripts on a secure, password-protected computer. Documents from the CPS process and interview transcripts were kept in a folder on the computer bearing the same title as the pseudonym. The transcript was shared with the respective participant to review for any errors or inaccuracies, to ensure credibility (Brown & Danaher, 2019). The researcher tabulated the Google survey results, housed on a secure, password-protected computer. The transcripts, documents, and questionnaire responses were uploaded into MAXQDA, a tool used to analyze and code the data (Sedghi et al., 2018). After the study, participants were debriefed on the information collected and the findings from the study. The researcher thanked the staff members for the participation and contribution to the research. Upon the conclusion of the data

analysis, participants received a summary of the findings.

Data Preparation

Before analysis, the researcher transcribed the audio and video recordings from the interviews. Transcribing the data allowed the analyst to listen attentively to how the interviewees answered. Themes emerged before coding, as several participants used the same words in their responses (Widodo, 2014). The responses allowed the analyst to notice commonalities among answers which then led to the formation of themes. To ensure trustworthiness, the participant received a copy of the respective recording and transcript for review (Brown & Danaher, 2019).

During the transcription of the interviews, possible themes emerged (Widodo, 2014). Upon multiple readings of the transcripts, notes indicated common trends in responses. These notes served as the initial open codes for the analysis. This method of determining common ideas at the onset is called *open coding* (Yin, 2011). Open coding is a means of determining themes (Jinsong et al., 2019).

The Google questionnaire results were generated. Open response questions were placed in a word document which was uploaded into MAXQDA. The remaining questions from the questionnaire were multiple choice and the Google platform generated graphs for these responses. These multiple-choice responses were exported into an Excel spreadsheet to prepare for upload into the MAXQDA system

The investigator uploaded all the anecdotal notes and documents from the CPS process as PDFs for the coding process. Again, common responses emerged and the analyst combined like answers into themes using the MAXQDA platform. After using the program, hand-coding was conducted to fine-tune how the responses were connected.

Data Analysis

The themes emerging from the notes served as the initial open codes for MAXQDA. Data uploaded into MAXQDA allowed for axial coding. This coding layer made connections between the open codes and reassembled the data into categories (Yin, 2011). The purpose of using axial coding was to reach a higher level of conceptual thinking (Yin, 2011). MAXQDA organized the transcripts, document PDFs, and the Excel spreadsheet for analysis. The content analysis conducted by MAXQDA allowed for a deeper understanding of the conclusions that emerged from the data (Sedghi et al., 2018). The three forms of data—interview transcripts, survey results, and document analysis—were reviewed for triangulation. Triangulation, which involves collecting multiple data sources, is necessary to determine if the same findings are present in each data collection type (Yin, 2011).

Reliability and Validity

To ensure the study is credible, multiple methods for validity were employed (Creswell, 2014). The first method was a triangulation of the data. In addition to the interviews, a Google questionnaire and document analysis were used to collect data. Similar themes emerged in all three formats, leading to validity in the study. Member checking occurred, and participants reviewed the interview transcripts. Participants also had an opportunity to view the themes that emerged from the data (Creswell, 2014). Participants were able to comment on the transcripts if the transcripts were inaccurate or if anything was missing from the data. The researcher made efforts to determine any discrepancies in the data (Yin, 2011). Finding discrepancies or negative situations helped to alleviate any potential bias.

Results from the study are transferable. The study results may be generalized to apply to larger groups (Khorsan & Crawford, 2014). The researcher conducted a rich, in-depth analysis and confirmed transferability by using thorough descriptions to convey the research findings

(Creswell, 2014). Another measure taken to ensure the study's transferability was to vary the participants across grade levels (Khorsan & Crawford, 2014). By allowing participants who represent various positions in the school, the data were more likely to prove to be transferable (Khorsan & Crawford, 2014).

Dependability requires the findings to remain the same over time (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Member checking verified themes (Creswell, 2014). The use of document analysis, interviews, and participant surveys confirmed the triangulation of the data results. The use of reflexivity, or the addition of anecdotal notes (Korstjens & Moser, 2018), confirmed the findings. The ability to be mindful and acknowledge the possibility of bias in research is significant (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The anecdotal notes were included in the study and included any decisions crafted during the interview process and reflective thoughts from the research process (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

Site permission was acquired from the school leadership (see Appendix C) before recruiting staff members. Once participants were determined, all communications were made over personal emails and phones and never on school-issued email addresses or phones. This effort secured staff privacy. Staff members who agreed to participate in the research study received a document outlining the study's goal and the nature of the research (Yin, 2011). The recruiter distributed informed consent forms specifying the study's activities (interviews, surveys, document review), eligibility, risks and benefits, confidentiality information, a voluntary participation clause, information about audio recording, and an opt-out clause (see Appendix G). Anecdotal notes, transcripts, surveys, and documents included pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. The informed consent form explained pseudonym usage (Stake, 1995).

All data collected are stored on a password-protected computer. Participants had the opportunity to opt out of the research at any point, in compliance with the opt-out clause. Participants may have chosen not to answer any question that created any type of discomfort, and the researcher would not have assessed any penalty if this action occurred.

Before the research began, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the study (Tartaro & Levy, 2015). No known conflicts of interest were present. The researcher had 27 years of educational experience, had previously taught each grade level represented in the study, and worked as an instructional coach in the school where the research took place. This experience and current position allowed the researcher to respect peers, enabling staff members to trust the researcher. This rapport and established relationship allowed for more truthfulness in responses (Amankwaa, 2016). The use of audio and video recordings, member checking, and triangulation helped to minimize any type of bias.

Chapter Summary

The problem emerging in education is educators do not believe school leadership has made efforts to build teacher capacity in assisting students with behavior issues, often originating from childhood trauma (Day et al., 2017; Hambacher, 2018; Holmes et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016; Nadeem et al., 2011). The aim of the qualitative case study was to examine teacher perceptions of a trauma-responsive problem-solving method.

Using an instrumental case study, the researcher-developed research questions collected information based on the study's problem. Staff members were selected based on interest and contact with students. Semi-structured interviews, surveys, and document analysis triangulated results. Virtual interviews were recorded and transcribed, and member checking ensured credibility and dependability. Data were open coded and axial coded using MAXQDA.

The researcher addressed ethical concerns through the IRB review. Before any research occurred, site permission and informed consent were obtained. Participants received confirmation on how the information would be kept confidential and how to opt out of the study if necessary. All potential biases and conflicts of interest were fully transparent. No conflict of interest existed between the participants and the researcher.

With the questions, instruments, participants, and approval from the IRB in place, the study commenced. Data were collected, coded, and analyzed. Members had the opportunity to check for discrepancies, and findings were shared. Chapter 4 includes a review of the findings from the study.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Data Analysis Results

Childhood trauma is an escalating problem across the United States (Holmes et al., 2015). Teachers struggle to manage behaviors stemming from childhood trauma (Brunzell et al., 2015; Frydman & Mayor, 2017; Holmes et al., 2015). The challenge for educators often occurs due to the sense of being ill equipped to support students who have experienced trauma (Strom et al., 2016). Training is essential to provide staff members with tools to help these students (Barr, 2018; Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). Once provided trauma-responsive training, staff reported having more confidence in supporting students (Alisic, 2012; Vanderwegen, 2013). With a trauma-responsive lens, teachers can address student necessities, essential in a human's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943).

Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) is a tool which educators can utilize. In this trauma-responsive method, teachers form authentic relationships with students while facilitating growth in student socioemotional skills, such as empathy and problem solving (Greene & Winkler, 2019). The philosophy behind CPS states a child does well if able to (Greene & Winkler, 2019; Maddox et al., 2018). If an expectation outweighs a child's skill level, the child may not meet the expectation. The CPS process may strengthen relationships, teach children skills, and support the brain's development (Greene & Winkler, 2019). CPS could help staff members understand how to aid trauma-exposed students when exhibiting challenging behaviors in classrooms. The goal of the qualitative case study was to examine teacher perceptions of the CPS method.

The study comprised an exploration of the data to uncover findings. Included is an outline of the data collection method. The data were analyzed to determine themes. Results are shared to provide a clear understanding of the conclusions. Also included in the findings are the

practices enacted to ensure reliability and validity.

Data Collection

Staff members were recruited via email (see Appendix A), and all 15 participants submitted informed consent forms. The recruiter sent informed consent forms (see Appendix G) to participants' private email accounts to ensure anonymity from the school district. The recruiter collected informed consent forms in April 2020, before any data collection. All 15 staff members participated in semi-structured interviews lasting between 15 and 45 minutes, depending on how much each participant shared. The interviewer conducted all baseline interviews during May 2020. Each participant completed a Google questionnaire during May 2020. The questionnaire took no longer than 15 minutes to complete. Participants completed the interview and questionnaire virtually. The investigator held discussions through the GoToMeeting platform, allowing for recording and transcription. The interviewer used pseudonyms to protect participant anonymity. Data were collected and stored on a password-protected computer. The interviewer cleaned up interview transcripts to remove any repeated words and fillers such as "um" and "ah," and sent the clean transcript to the respective participant for review within 72 hours of the virtual meeting's conclusion.

Once the staff received training in the CPS process, participants began experimenting with CPS during August, September, and October 2020. Following the first set of interviews, each of the 15 staff members conducted one or more sessions with students using the CPS method. The investigator held sessions over the computer as all students and staff in the district were working virtually. The CPS sessions were not recorded as no transcription was necessary, and no permissions were granted for students to participate in the study. Anecdotal records from the sessions were kept and stored on a password-protected computer. The interviewer shared

documents from the sessions with the participants.

From October to November 2020, staff members were once again involved in virtual interviews, without students present. Interviews were conducted through the GoToMeeting platform allowing for recording and transcription. In the second interview, the questions asked were the same as the initial baseline questions earlier in the year. The second set of interviews took less time to complete for each participant and ranged from 15 to 25 minutes. The researcher used the same pseudonyms to anonymize the participants and allowed the analyst to compare the first and second interviews. Within 48 hours of the second interview's conclusion, the interviewer sent a transcript to the respective participant for review. Participants also completed a second virtual Google questionnaire that was identical to the first questionnaire. The recruiter made every attempt to secure participants from across the elementary grade band. Participant demographics are summarized in Table 1.

Data Analysis and Results

The investigator conducted baseline interviews in May 2020, then follow-up conversations 5 months later. The purpose of the interviews was to answer the research questions surrounding teacher perceptions of the CPS process before and after receiving training about the CPS model. Before beginning each interview, the interviewer asked for verbal consent to record the interview. Each participant consented. Before questioning began, the investigator notified participants of the study's aim and informed of the right to opt out of any question, or the interview, at any time. None of the participants opted out of any questions during the baseline or second set of interviews.

Table 1*Participant Demographics*

Demographic variable	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Male	0	0.0
Female	15	100.0
Grade level		
K	1	6.7
3	1	6.7
3–5	1	6.7
1	2	13.3
2	2	13.3
4	2	13.3
5	2	13.3
K–5	4	26.7
Job description		
Classroom teacher	10	66.7
Specialist	3	20.0
Paraprofessional	2	13.3

The goal of the interviews was to answer the three research questions:

Research Question 1: What are teacher perceptions of the collaborative problem-solving model?

Research Question 2: What are teacher perceptions after learning and implementing the collaborative problem-solving process?

Research Question 3: How does collaborative problem solving impact students who have experienced childhood trauma?

The researcher analyzed responses to determine themes to answer the three research questions. The analyzer expected the staff members to be less knowledgeable of the CPS model during the baseline interviews.

Data Preparation and Coding

Each of the interviews was input into MAXQDA for coding. The researcher created initial codes based on individual responses to each of the research questions. The researcher coded and sub coded each of the 30 interviews to find themes. Initial codes emerged as the interviews were conducted. The researcher created the subcodes through a manual coding process. Through manual coding, the researcher was able to find more extensive codes. While coding, the researcher highlighted, in different colors, patterns in the responses. Subcodes were then added to MAXQDA. The manual coding process was repeated once again to saturate the data thoroughly. Themes emerged after the first manual coding process. Still, the codes became even more specific after the second round of manual coding.

The Google platform tabulated the data from the questionnaires. The researcher entered open-response questions into MAXQDA for additional data points. Again, the researcher placed data into codes aligned to the interviews. Fewer coded segments in MAXQDA were collected from the questionnaire as only one open-response question was included. All of the additional items in the questionnaire were able to be quantified.

Over 3 months, the entire staff at the elementary school was trained, by a team of educators, in the CPS process. After the training had occurred, the 15 participants and additional staff members participated in the CPS process. The 15 participants identified students who had experienced trauma; these students collaborated with the adults to solve the defined problem.

The researcher collected anecdotal notes during the CPS process. The data were coded

manually and then placed into the MAXQDA program. The manual codes aligned with the codes from the interviews and questionnaire. Several key themes emerged by coding the three types of data—interviews, questionnaires, and anecdotal notes.

Key Themes

When seeking the answers to the research questions regarding staff perceptions of the CPS process, significant themes emerged through the coding process. The themes substantiated findings in the literature review. Themes emerged that corroborate the theoretical framework of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. The researcher explored and analyzed these critical themes from the lens of the research questions and the theoretical framework.

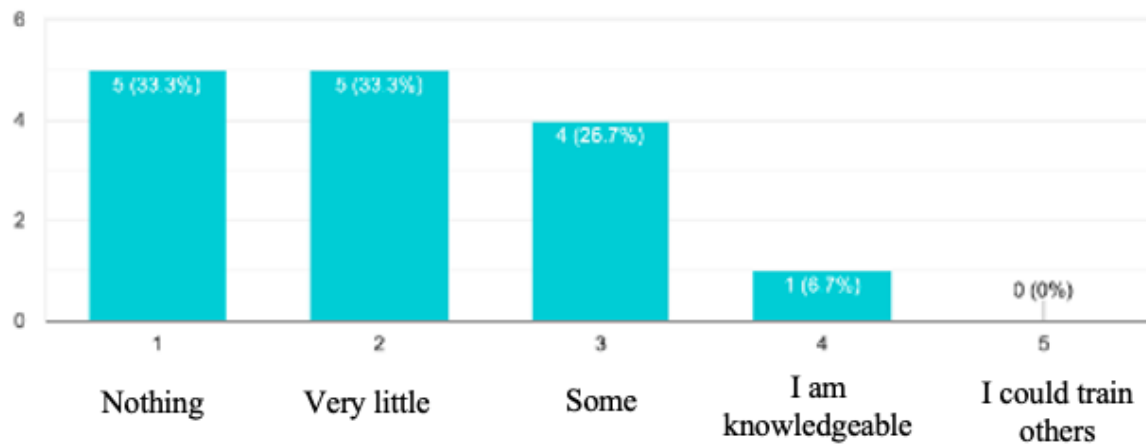
Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, what are teacher perceptions of the collaborative problem-solving model? Participants were interviewed by the investigator before receiving training on the CPS model to answer this question. Several themes emerged in regard to staff perceptions of CPS: the consideration staff gave to the idea of using CPS, who is involved, confidence levels, personal strengths and weaknesses, and the need for training.

Theme 1: Positive Consideration. In examining the data from the baseline interviews, three of the 15 participants knew how the process would work as those participants had attended previous trainings. Ten participants did not understand what CPS was, but many were eager to learn about the process. When asked to rate the level of knowledge of the CPS process on a Likert scale from 1 (*nothing*) to 5 (*I could train other staff members*), 10 participants scored themselves as a 1 or 2 (*a little*; see Figure 3).

Figure 3

What Do You Know About the Collaborative Problem-Solving Process?



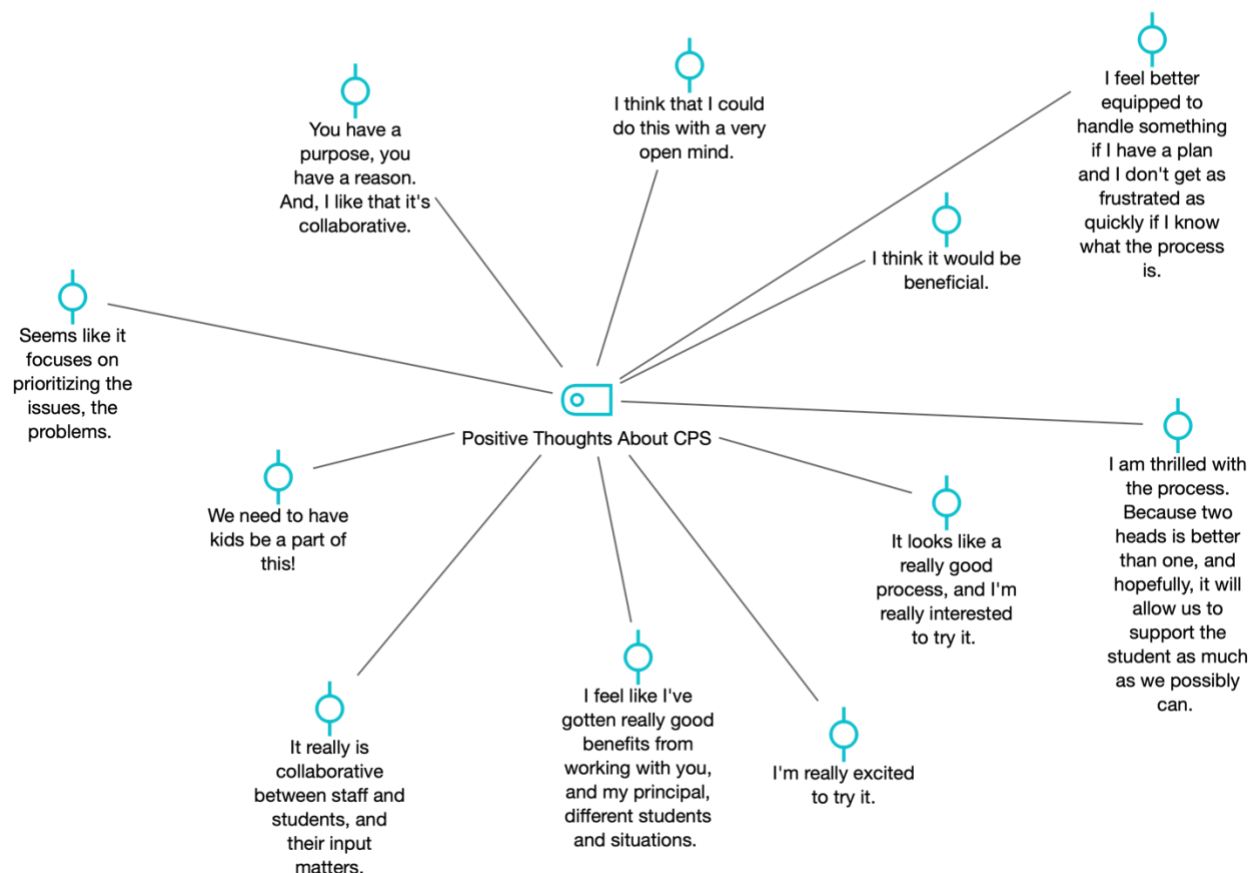
Despite a lack of knowledge about the process, educators expressed an interest to try the method. Participant 1 stated, “I am excited to try it.” And Participant 13 remarked, “I think it would be beneficial.” Before being trained as a staff in the CPS model, 100% of the participants believed the idea of collaborating to solve a problem would have positive benefits (see Figure 4). Six of the interviewees commented on the importance of working with others to solve problems.

Theme 2: Who Is Involved. Six participants stated having more than one person be a part of determining a solution would benefit the outcome. In the baseline interviews, only one of the 15 participants mentioned involving the student in the process. Despite acknowledging the student as a participant in the process, the staff member included other people. Participant 14 stated CPS was “trying to work together with the student and other faculty members to come up with a solution.” Participant 11 said, “I would assume it means in our building, we, as a faculty, would work together to solve behavioral and academic problems.” Several participants believed

CPS was a process to use with colleagues, such as grade-level peers, teachers in other buildings, the instructional coach, and the principal.

Figure 4

Positive Thoughts Before Learning About Collaborative Problem Solving

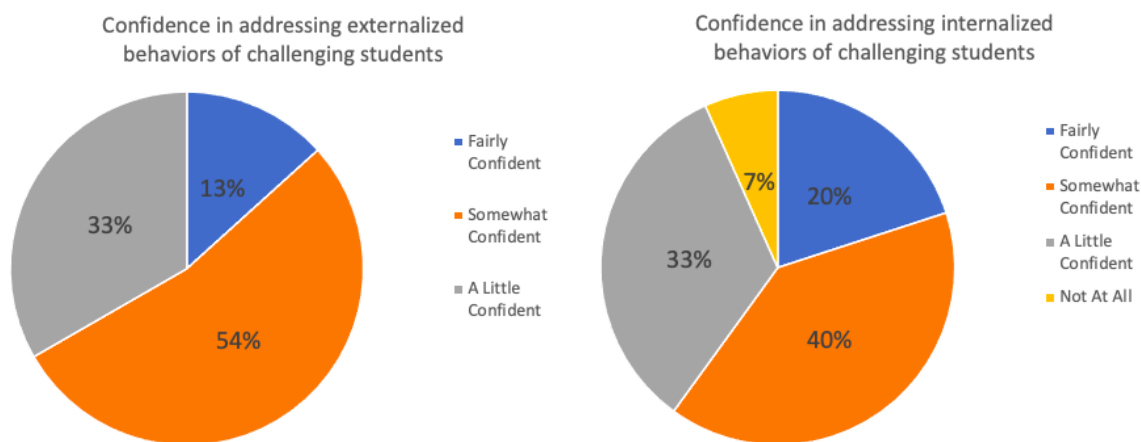


Theme 3: Level of Confidence. In the baseline interviews, staff indicated a lack of confidence or partial confidence in supporting students who have experienced trauma. Participants noted possessing confidence due to experience or ability to form relationships with students. Participant 15 had “some confidence in myself and in working with them as I’ve been a teacher for quite some time.” Participant 8 stated, “I thought I was doing ok, but then after reading *Help for Billy*, it gave me a whole new picture of what these kids need, and it was a bit

different than what I thought.” In terms of building relationships, staff declared confidence in the ability to support students. Participant 5 stated, “I feel fairly confident that I could help them just by, you know, being able to relate to them.” Participant 2 indicated having “zero” confidence in being able to support students who had experienced trauma. Participant 9 remarked, “Sometimes you’re just on a sinking ship and grasping at straws.” Staff confidence, indicated in the questionnaire, paralleled the interview responses (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Participant Confidence Levels for Addressing Challenging Students’ Externalized and Internalized Behaviors



Theme 4: Staff Strengths and Weaknesses. Staff members were able to identify strengths in supporting students who have experienced trauma. Most notably, faculty stated the ability to build relationships with students significantly helped students who have experienced trauma. Thirteen of the 15 participants commented on the importance of forming relationships with students. Participants recognized the positive impact gained from working to “establish a pretty good relationship” (Participant 3), the importance of “building a relationship with them” (Participant 7), and “getting to know them on a personal level” (Participant 11). Most

participants cited empathy as a necessary component for supporting students who have experienced trauma. Ten of the 15 participants mentioned the need for staff members to listen and empathize to truly help students. Showing compassion and care and exhibiting a calm and patient demeanor were additional strengths the participants detailed as key to aiding students.

While every staff member could determine what strengths led to support for students, each also discussed the challenges. Nine participants noted a common challenge. Losing patience and getting frustrated was the number one challenge for participants. Participant 4 stated, “Sometimes patience doesn’t always come out.” Participant 14 remarked, “I get frustrated, just like everybody else, when I don’t feel like I’m properly prepared to handle it.” Participant 10 recalled, “I kinda lose it because of my stress.” Difficulty relating to the trauma students have experienced, second-guessing oneself, not becoming too emotional over the trauma, and balancing the need to support individual students with the needs of the entire class and expectations of the school and district were additional challenges. Table 2 identifies the most common strengths and weaknesses participants indicated.

Table 2*Staff-Identified Strengths and Weaknesses*

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Strength		
Built relationships	13	86.7
Empathy	10	66.7
Calm/patient	9	60.0
Care for students	8	53.3
Personal trauma facilitates being able to relate	3	20.0
Weakness		
Difficulty remaining patient and not being frustrated	9	60.0
Second-guessing self/lack confidence to say/do the right thing	7	46.7
Inability to relate to trauma	7	46.7
Not get too emotional about the trauma	6	40.0
Balance class versus individual	3	20.0

Theme 5: Training Supports Strengths and Minimizes Weaknesses. The need for training was evident in the findings. Each member of the study received training in the effects of trauma on children before the data were collected. Participants 1 and 2 had previously received training in nonviolent crisis intervention, a method used primarily to de-escalate students in crisis and, as a last resort, to safely restrain children while maintaining a child's care, welfare, safety, and security. Eleven of the 15 participants indicated the training mirrored the participants' identified strengths and weaknesses. The participants described weakness as areas where staff members needed additional training. Participant 12 stated,

I think that if I had more to pull, like, from my toolbox, I definitely feel like I can be more confident in that and that place, know, in that place of being able to bring calm to a

dysregulated child.

The data from the questionnaire echoed the results of the interviews. Twelve respondents indicated receiving an average to fair amount of training in supporting students who have challenging behaviors. Twelve responded the training helped build strengths and lessen weaknesses.

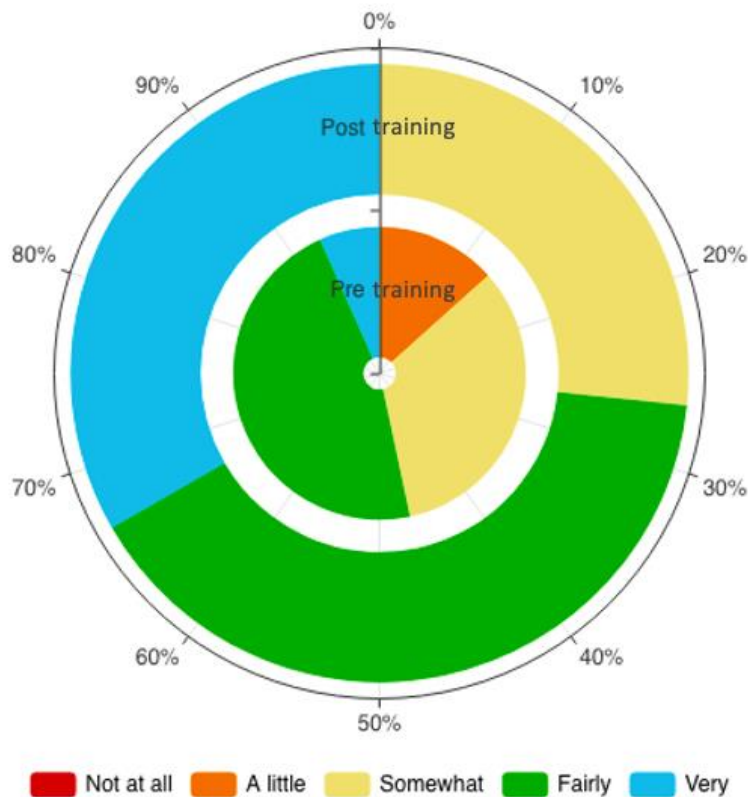
Participants indicated a desire for additional training. Regarding the training already received, Participant 15 stated, “It certainly isn’t enough. I want more.” Participant 3 remarked,

You know, if I had more training . . . I think that it’d be easier to know what motivators there are for those kids, and I think that if I felt that I had more tools in my tool belt, so to speak, that I would be able to handle things, you know, more effectively.

Participant 4 expressed a need for additional learning to support students who have experienced trauma and display challenging behaviors: “I do feel like there’s more that I would like to know and more that I would like to work through.”

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked, what are teacher perceptions after learning and implementing the collaborative problem-solving process? The investigator interviewed 15 staff members following training and implementation of the CPS method. From the first to the second set of interviews, the number of participants who believed the training received supported the indicated abilities increased. When initially asked if the training staff had received was helpful, only eight participants rated a 4 (*fairly*) or 5 (*very*) on a Likert scale. After the CPS training, 11 members rated a 4 or 5, and no scores were below a 3 (*somewhat*; see Figure 6).

Figure 6*Is Training Helpful?*

Additional themes were discovered from the post training interviews. Notably, participants began to understand the benefits of including students in the process. Conversations shifted from surface-level discussions to exchanges leading to the root of the problem. Participants began to recognize when educators made assumptions, and the belief in CPS emerged as a useful tool for supporting students who had experienced trauma.

Theme 6: Children Need to Be Involved. From the first question asked, participants recognized, after the training, the importance of including students in the problem-solving process. Staff members may believe seeking advice and assistance from peers is helpful, but when it is time to solve the problem, the child needs to be involved. Participant 7 noticed,

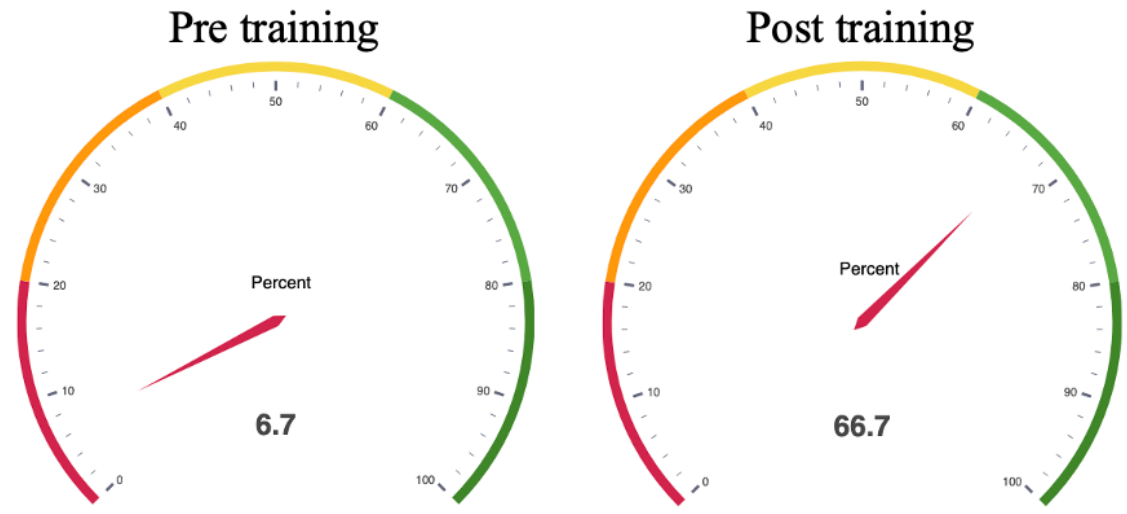
“Usually, teachers don’t really include them [students], but collaboratively working with them helps include them in the process and maybe helps them understand and know what they should be doing.” Recognizing the child as a stakeholder in the problem requires the adults to include the students in the solution. Typically, adults arbitrarily determine solutions that may or may not work due to not knowing the depths of the concern on the student’s part. Participant 14 stated, “I know that collaborative problem solving is a way to solve problems with students, ensuring that they are involved in the process and not just adults implementing strategies unilaterally.” Similar to Participant 14, Participant 5 enjoyed the accountability the process allowed for the student:

I think it’s great because I think that the kids take ownership and responsibility of their actions, and they also feel like I’m not talking at them but I’m actually working with them. It’s like you know it’s just an equal.

Ten respondents to the questionnaire identified conversations with students as the strategy used when students do not follow expectations. Before training, only 6.7% of staff indicated inclusion of students in the process. Post training, 66.7% of staff specified involving students in the process (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Staff Percentage Indicating Whether Students Need to Be Involved



Theme 6: Getting to the Root of the Problem. Once participants had engaged in the CPS process, the conversations with students shifted from trying to solve problems unilaterally to solving problems in collaboration with children. Post training, participants acknowledged the problem solving involved uncovering the problem’s root from the student’s perspective. Participant 14 identified what is essential is “first inquiring as to what is causing them [students] difficulty, why it’s making them difficult, why it’s making it difficult for them to meet the expectation.” Similar to Participant 14, Participant 11 said staff needs to “try to figure out what’s preventing them [students] from meeting the expectation. We talk through how we can solve some of the problems of why they are not meeting the expectations. What’s the roadblock in meeting the expectations?” Necessary to Participant 13 was using a strategy to determine the lagging skills and unsolved problems; the process allowed the conversation toward the root cause of the issue with more ease. During the implementation process, Participant 14 remarked, “This [CPS process] really helps me to go through the process. It makes me realize some of the

problems I thought the students were having were actually my problem because I didn't make my expectations clear consistently."

Theme 7: Making Assumptions. During the process, the anecdotal notes indicated staff members often make many assumptions. In 13 of the 15 CPS conversations, participants had to rephrase the unsolved problems to remove beliefs. Often, participants would make statements about the issue a student was having, such as "difficulty paying attention to the teacher during math class" (K. Northern, observation, November 5, 2020). The investigator took care to redirect the staff member back to what the expectation was. As a teacher, there is no way to know if a student is paying attention or not, regardless of how the student appears. The unsolved problem had to be rewritten to "difficulty looking at the teacher when math is being taught" (K. Northern, observation, November 5, 2020), as watching the teacher was the expectation. By the end of the assessment of lagging skills and unsolved problems portion of the process, all 13 participants found themselves pausing and making comments such as, "I wanted to say something, but I now realize it was an assumption." After going through the process, Participant 6 reflected, "Now I know why this is happening. The student told me some information that I didn't know because I hadn't collaborated with them yet." Participants began to grasp the notion that assumptions, often incorrect, may not lead the conversation toward the problem's real root.

Theme 8: Collaborative Problem Solving Is a Useful Tool. Vanderwegen (2013) and Alisic (2012) indicated teachers need and want additional strategies in the teacher toolbox. Collaborative problem solving is another tool which staff members can employ when students present challenging behaviors. When working with students who have experienced trauma, CPS allows students a voice. Participant 12 said,

I love the idea of giving kids control. I think that's part of the issue with kids who've had

trauma is they don't have control . . . I think this gives them another piece that they can control. So, I think it does become empowering to them, So I do love that. I love that we're giving them other tools.

Participant 12 was the only staff member who acknowledged CPS as a tool not only for staff members but also for students. Every member of the study acknowledged CPS as a positive strategy for supporting students who have experienced trauma (see Table 3).

Table 3

Staff Perceptions of Collaborative Problem Solving

Staff member quote	Code
"I think there's a lot of validity to it. I think it's a good process."	Valid/results oriented
"I think it is a really good approach to prioritizing problems. I really value it, and I think it's a good thing. I feel very positive about it."	Positive feelings
"I feel like it's a great way just to, like, get them to join the conversation as well."	Collaborative
"I think it's been a great thing, and I think it's been really helpful to do the process. Even just to get the other side's concerns and to figure out together how to address them. I feel like it's been beneficial because I've used the things that we talked about and that we came up with."	Valid/results oriented
"I think I learned a lot, and I have less fear bout trying it now, and I saw the results."	Valid/results oriented
"I'm just grateful that we're using it, and it's another tool. I'm positive that we can all just kind of grow in this."	Positive feelings

Staff member quote	Code
“I think it’s the only and the best way to solve problems.”	Collaborative
“I think it’s great because I think not one person can solve all problems on their own, so if people are willing to help do that and it’s best for the students, it’s great. I think it is very beneficial, and I like it, and I’ve seen it work.”	Collaborative
“I want to practice it.”	Desire to do more
“It was a great process.”	Positive feelings
“I think it is amazing, and I don’t know why we didn’t do this all along. It has helped me stay calm, be more understanding, and actually solve problems in the process.”	Valid/results oriented
“I wish I had known about it sooner. If I’d know things, things could have been handled differently with my own children, with students, with, you know, kids that I used to work with in other capacities.”	Desire to do more
“It will be very useful.”	Positive feelings
“I’ve got high hopes for this.”	Positive feelings

Whether improvements in the ability to help adults regulate themselves during the problem-solving process or the benefits the staff saw, every participant found an advantage in using the problem-solving process. Three participants indicated the virtual learning setting presents some challenges in-person learning may eradicate. For example, students do not always remain in the virtual meeting for the problem-solving conversation. Participants had to reschedule when students did not stay on the virtual meeting planned for the discussion or staff had to track the student down to restart the virtual session. When in person, staff members would have an easier time pulling students for one-on-one conversations.

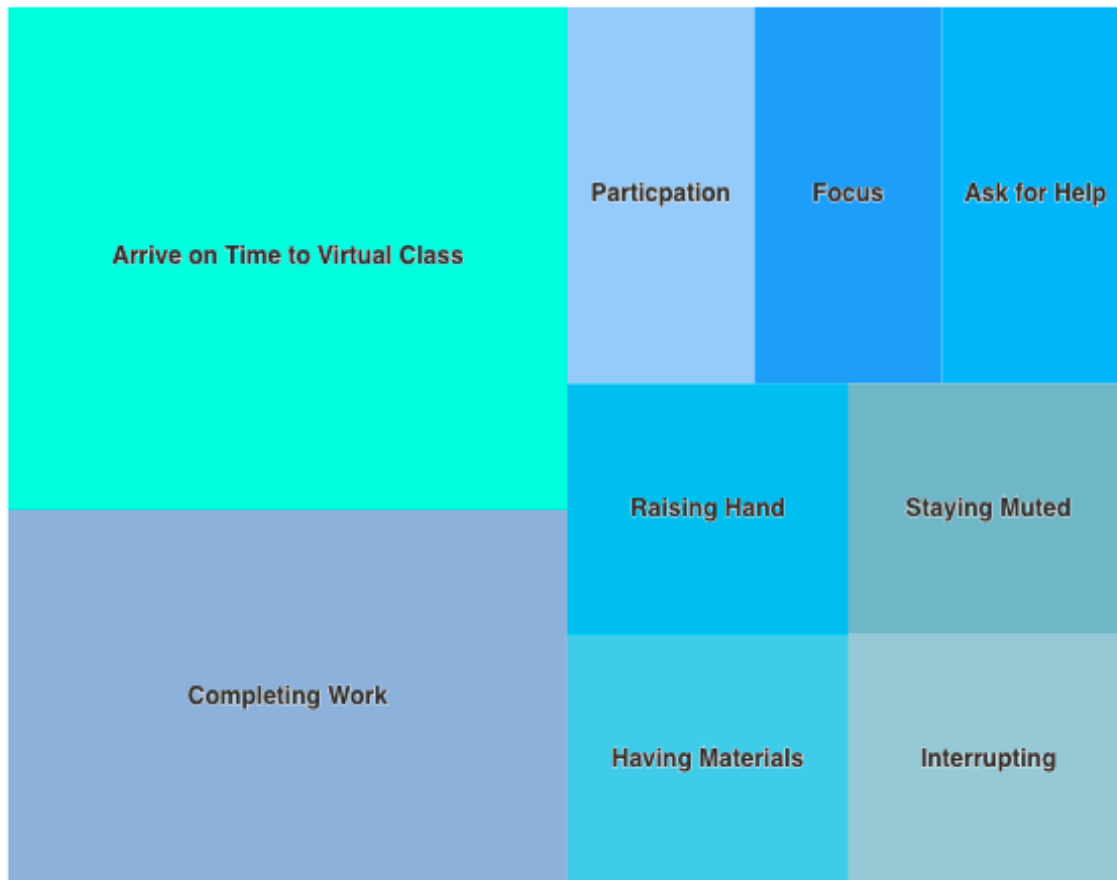
Another challenge during the implementation process mentioned by several participants is how, during in-person learning, staff have more control over the environment. If the student

had concerns with the environment while in person, the staff member would be more likely to make adjustments to support the student. Adapting to the environment is more difficult during virtual learning. In one case, a parent joined in the problem-solving conversation. The parent's participation was helpful as the student's concern was the noise in the home. The parent agreed to purchase noise-canceling headphones to help the student hear the lessons better. While the intent to acquire headphones was a helpful solution, the teacher could not solve the problem simply through collaboration with the student, due to environmental concerns being an issue out of the teacher's or child's control.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked, how does collaborative problem solving impact students who have experienced childhood trauma? Participants were asked to reflect on any impact the CPS process had on students behaviorally or academically. Every teacher cited the usefulness of CPS as a tool to use with students; in addition, many described the specific impact staff witnessed in students after implementing the process. The likelihood of using the process in the future was an emerging theme.

Theme 9: Impact on Students. One hundred percent of participants reported a positive change in students' behavior or academic achievement. Of those interviewed, 20% cited the change as instant or immediate. Participant 12 described the impact: "On Friday we had the conversation and Monday there is already a change . . . there was an immediate change." Several behavioral and academic changes garnered positive improvements (see Figure 8). Work completion and arriving on time to virtual classes were the largest concerns staff members addressed.

Figure 8*Areas of Positive Impact*

Comments from participants who engaged in the process reflected the positive impact CPS had on the children. Regarding several students, Participant 12 stated, “The child of which we are speaking has been participating much more,” “She’s acting more confident,” “He’s getting more stuff actually done,” and “She was in class all morning.” Each staff member observed a noticeable change in either academic achievement or behavior. Participant 15 seemed concerned the problem would resurface but stated the reason might be “because of remote learning.”

Some participants gave a detailed rationale for why staff members believe the CPS

process had a positive impact. Participant 1 stated,

I have seen huge changes in students. The biggest is in the area of trust. Students who go through this process seem to come out on the other side, feeling they have a person who is theirs, someone who will listen to them and who wants the best for them.

Participant 4 indicated a change in the level of trust:

I think that with this, they almost feel like trust or more trust. They trust you're hearing them and working on a mutually satisfying solution versus just telling them what to do, and I think they're more willing to do whatever needs to be done. They might not be happy with it, but at least we can work toward it. We can work together to do it.

Participant 10 commented, "I actually like it because I feel like the kids are getting more, they're buying into, solving, and working through the problems with you. I think they're feeling respected because we're asking their opinion."

Theme 10: Likelihood to Use in Future. Of the 15 participants interviewed and surveyed, 100% committed to using the process in the future. Seven of the respondents indicated a desire for continued support in implementing the method. Participant 2 commented on having to change her mindset from what was familiar, based on her upbringing:

My tendency is going to be to revert to habit and revert to what I know and what I'm comfortable with, and since I am not that comfortable with this, I'm going to backslide. And so, there's the mind shift that's got to happen. At least I know that it's there. It's just now, I've just got to be aware enough to catch myself . . . I've got to rewire some of my thought processes.

Three participants noted additional students, biological children, and adults with whom the staff wanted to use the process. Participant 14 stated, "I will use it for myself, but I will encourage

others to use it.” Many participants articulated being “very likely” to use the process in the future. The most emphatic response came from Participant 8, who said in response to being asked if the CPS process would be used in the future, “1,000% yes!”

Evaluation of Findings

Educators do not believe school leaders have attempted to build teacher competence in helping students who have experienced trauma and exhibit challenging behaviors in the classroom (Day et al., 2017; Hambacher, 2018; Holmes et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016; Nadeem et al., 2011). As discussed in the literature review, school staff members desire training in the area of trauma-responsive practices. Staff members require training to comprehend the adverse effects trauma has on a child’s brain and a student’s ability to learn (Barr, 2018; Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). The findings from the research corroborate the findings of previous authors, discussed in the literature review. Adequately trained staff members reported an increased comfort level in supporting trauma-exposed students (Alisic, 2012; Vanderwegen, 2013). Educators want training, and as the research revealed, once given training, staff felt more capable of using the tools staff were trained to employ. An undeniable connection exists between training and a staff member’s capacity to support trauma-exposed children.

Positive and supportive relationships can heighten resilience in students and lessen the effects of trauma on children (Arincorayan et al., 2017; McConnico et al., 2016). The findings indicated the participants understood the power of relationship building as staff members witnessed authentic quality relationships positively impacted students, behaviorally and academically. Willis and Nagel (2015) asserted effective staff–student relationships lead to positive student changes. The findings from this study concurred; the study’s results reflected an increase in participants’ understanding of the importance of gaining the student perspective.

Obsuth et al. (2017) claimed the child's perspective is more important than the staff member's perspective. The concept of building trust in students was discovered by several of the participants. Maslow (1943) alleged physiological needs must be met for a person to reach self-actualization. One of these basic needs is safety and security. Trust is a foundational requirement for achieving fulfillment in the lower levels of the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943).

Participants of the study indicated a range of student behavior concerns. The concerns aligned with the findings of Ollendick et al. (2016) and Stetson and Plog (2016), who stated teacher areas of concern range from executive functioning skills to communication skills, attention, time management, and adaptability. The findings from this study concurred with Stetson and Plog, who claimed the identified area of concern becomes the focus of the collaborative conversation with the student. As discovered in the findings from this study, non-accusatory and unassuming language, while required in the model (Greene & Winkler, 2019), was difficult for staff members to accomplish.

The literature review indicated benefits to CPS (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). As Greene and Winkler (2019) claimed, and the findings from this study corroborated, a better understanding of the others' perspectives occurs for both parties in the CPS conversation. Stetson and Plog (2016) alleged problem behaviors exhibited by students would decrease. A decrease in unexpected behaviors was evident in the study's findings as all participants reported a positive change in the students' actions.

Along with each staff member's positive gains after implementing the CPS process, participants expressed a definitive desire to continue learning and using the method. The findings from the study were clear. Staff members' perceptions of the CPS process were positive. Participants enjoyed learning and implementing the strategy, and all of the educators who

participated in the study could see a place for the CPS process in the future.

Reliability and Validity

Studies are more trustworthy when credibility, transparency, and transferability are included within the research (Shenton, 2004). The researcher met credibility criteria as the data were triangulated. The interview questions, Google questionnaire, and document analysis all focused on the same queries. Within the three forms of data, the same themes emerged, creating validity within the study.

The study measured staff perceptions of the CPS model by educators who work with students who have experienced trauma. Two inclusion criteria were used to ensure appropriate participation: The staff member needs to have (a) daily and direct contact with students and (b) the willingness to participate in the CPS training. The recruiter invited participants via email (see Appendix A). The invitation to participate explained the requirements of the study. No participants were compensated or coerced. All participants volunteered and expressed interest to the recruiter. Before being interviewed, participants were informed of the study's goals and allowed to opt out of any questions. The recruiter explained pseudonyms in informed consent (Stake, 1995). Data were collected and stored on a password-protected computer (Oleinik, 2011). The researcher connected the research questions to the interview queries to preserve the consistency of data. The investigator focused solely on the interview questions and asked for clarification or more details only when needed (Turner, 2010).

Transparency was achieved as member checking occurred within 48 hours of each interview. The participants had the opportunity to review the transcripts. Participants had immediate access to all anecdotal notes from the training and implementation process. Participants were allowed to check for any inconsistencies in the data. Yin (2011) asserted a

researcher must make an effort to find discrepancies in data. This practice of allowing members to review and correct transcripts helped to alleviate any potential bias.

Khorsan and Crawford (2014) stated, to be transferable, results from the study can be able to be generalized to larger groups. One tactic used by the investigator to ensure transferability was through a cross-section of various participants in the study. Participants varied in position and grade level. The training presented no variation from the outlined model, allowing other trainers to replicate the process among other participants.

Chapter Summary

The aim of the qualitative case study was to examine staff perceptions of the CPS method. The study posed three research questions. The first question addressed staff perceptions of the CPS model. Before receiving training in the CPS model, staff perceptions of the method were encouraging in nature. Participants believed a collaborative process would be beneficial to solving any type of problem. Before receiving CPS training, only one staff member reported a belief the student was a part of the process. Participants stated levels of confidence mirrored professional development previously received. Participants indicated strengths often came from training received. The weaknesses the participants defined occurred in areas in which the participants had received little or no training.

The second research question asked for staff perceptions once trained and after implementing the CPS method. After being trained in the CPS model, staff perceptions evolved. Post-CPS training, the majority of the staff recognized the importance of including students in the problem-solving process. Participants acknowledged the students as critical stakeholders in the process. The participants indicated students and staff had improved skills. Once trained, participants began to understand the conversations held with students needed to focus on the why

of the problem. Getting to the root or core of the issue, from the student's perspective, was a critical takeaway for the participants. Participants began to recognize the vast number of assumptions made regarding the students, and participants began to self-correct when adults conveyed personal theories. Every member of the study stated the CPS process was beneficial, and the participants cited several positive outcomes for students and adults.

The final research question was to determine what impact, if any, the staff member noticed in students after implementing the CPS process. Every staff member reported a positive effect on students. Participants indicated the difficulties students had ranged from arriving at class on time to completing classwork. Participants indicated improvement in areas of student behavior and academics. Every staff member who participated vowed to use the CPS process in the future. Chapter 5 includes interpretations, conclusions, limitations, recommendations, and leadership implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

A problem gaining momentum across the country is the number of students who have experienced trauma before reaching school age (Holmes et al., 2015). A result of these traumas is an increase in students' challenging classroom behaviors, which teachers struggle to manage (Brunzell et al., 2015; Frydman & Mayor, 2017; Holmes et al., 2015). The strain on staff members to control students who have experienced trauma and present problematic behaviors becomes magnified by the lack of training faculty receive in trauma-responsive practices. With training comes growth in staff capacity and confidence in supporting students who have experienced trauma (Alisic, 2012; Vanderwegen, 2013). Training allows teachers to provide students with the basic needs of safety and security, positioning the staff members to support students from the lens of servant leadership. When equipped with training to aid students, who have experienced trauma and display unexpected behaviors, the servant staff member shall attempt to serve the students' needs before the school's or district's needs.

When training is provided to support trauma-exposed students who display challenging behaviors, staff perceptions could change. Collaborative problem solving is a model for adults with students who have experienced trauma and present issues, defined as unsolved problems (Greene & Winkler, 2019). The model's primary focus is building cooperative and mutually serving relationships, in line with the servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977). The process focuses on relationships wherein trust is built, satisfying the child's basic needs. Positive student-teacher relationships can diminish the effects of trauma (Arincorayan et al., 2017; McConnico et al., 2016). The study explored teacher perceptions of the CPS model used with students who have experienced trauma and present challenging behaviors.

Through a qualitative case study, participants answered interview questions that aligned

with the research questions. Fifteen staff members with varying job titles and grade-level representation participated in the study (see Table 1). The study's goal was to gather staff perceptions of the CPS process before and after receiving training in the model and to determine if there was any impact on the child from a behavioral or academic lens. The investigator accomplished the study's objectives through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires that were administered twice. The first occurrence was before receiving training in the CPS model. After receiving 3 months of training in the model and after implementing the process with a minimum of one student, the second interviews occurred. During the implementation process, the investigator took anecdotal notes to triangulate the data.

The data were coded for themes and viewed through the lens of the research questions. Findings uncovered a desire for training among staff members and a willingness to try something new to build staff capacity to support students exposed to traumatic situations. In many cases, the desire for additional training arose from a lack of confidence on the part of the staff member in the ability to support students who had experienced trauma and present challenging behaviors in the school setting (see Figure 5). Participants identified individual strengths and weaknesses regarding helping students who have experienced trauma and demonstrate problematic behaviors in school (see Table 2). Staff members reported a connection between educator strengths and areas of completed training. The participants described a relationship between staff weaknesses and topics in which no training occurred.

Once training transpired and staff members had the opportunity to implement the CPS model, additional findings emerged. Staff members reported CPS training was more helpful than other trainings that had been received previously (see Figure 6). Notably, staff members acknowledged the importance of including students in the process of problem solving (see Figure

7). The benefits of collaboration were noted. Staff members revealed the propensity to make assumptions about students that may or may not be accurate. Participants began to realize these assumptions could lead the course of a discussion away from the actual root of the problem. All participants indicated using the CPS model as an effective strategy with students who have experienced trauma and display challenging behaviors (see Table 3).

The findings exposed a highly favorable inclination to use CPS due to a positive result or impact in every case. The student achievements ranged from behavioral improvements to academic skill progress (see Figure 8). Following are the research findings, interpretations, and conclusions. During the data collection and analysis process, limitations to the study became apparent and steered the analyst toward suggestions for future research. The recommendations led to implications for leadership.

Findings, Interpretations, Conclusions

Children who have experienced trauma display behaviors that are a challenge for teachers to manage in the classroom (Day et al., 2017; Hambacher, 2018; Holmes et al., 2015; McConnico et al., 2016; Nadeem et al., 2011). Hambacher (2018) claimed teachers are ill equipped to handle many of these behaviors due to a lack of training. The goal of this qualitative case study was to examine staff perceptions of a trauma-responsive problem-solving model. The study's aim was achieved through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and a review of anecdotal notes. The researcher analyzed data from the lens of the research questions and interpretations based on the themes that materialized. The findings from the study were vast; nonetheless, three significant conclusions emerged - staff need training, relationships are vital when solving problems, and CPS is a tool which has positive effects.

Training Is Needed to Minimize Weaknesses

Barr (2018) and Rosenbaum-Nordoft (2018) claimed teachers need the training to better understand the effects of trauma on a child's ability to learn. Without training, staff members may mistake symptoms of trauma for misbehavior (Barr, 2018). The present study's findings described teacher-identified weaknesses and a lack of confidence in supporting students who have experienced trauma (see Table 2). Vanderwegen (2013) and Alisic (2012) contended, with training comes an increase in teacher comfort level when supporting students who have experienced trauma. Increased teacher confidence was evident in the findings from the present study. Several staff members desired additional training to support the identified weaknesses. Almost three quarters of the participants indicated the training received coincided with the identified strengths. Staff members reported finding training in CPS profoundly helpful (see Figure 6).

Relationships Are Vital to Solving Problems

All relationships have more than one participant (Greene, 2014). Typically, when an expectation goes unmet in the classroom, two parties are involved: the staff member setting the expectation and the child not meeting the expectation (Greene, 2014). When an unsolved problem or unmet expectation arises, both involved parties are central to finding out the cause of the problem. Often, adults make assumptions about why a child is not meeting an expectation, and the adult is often incorrect (Greene, 2014; Green & Winkler, 2019). The child is the only person who can honestly share what is standing in the way of meeting the expectation. To help the adult find out what the obstacle is, the child needs to participate in the problem-solving process (Greene, 2014). Hearing directly from the child helps avoid assumptions and helps find the root cause of the problem. Obsuth et al. (2017) claimed the child's viewpoint is more

important than the staff member's viewpoint. The CPS model requires the adult to understand the child's perspective (Greene & Winkler, 2019; Stetson & Plog, 2016). The study's findings indicated participants understood the child was an essential participant in the process of problem solving, which was not something staff members comprehended before the training (see Figure 7).

Staff members recognized the benefits that arose from talking with students. Through productive and authentic conversations, staff members could determine why students were having difficulties meeting expectations. Greene and Winkler (2019) stated adults have an opportunity to understand what challenges prohibit the child from adhering to expectations. The study's findings indicated staff members could have deep conversations that uncovered challenges preventing the child from meeting the expectation. Supportive relationships between students and staff transpire when educators take the time to listen and use fair practices with students (Gardner, 2019).

In one specific incident, the teacher admitted the problem was an adult problem due to a lack of clarity in the expectation. By analyzing the anecdotal records, the researcher became aware of frequent assumptions made by staff members. Eighty-seven percent of the staff members found themselves self-correcting assumptions. This epiphany by staff members allowed for a more open-minded conversation with the students when following the process. Collins et al. (2017) characterized strong relationships when there is closeness, caring, positive interactions, and an absence of conflict and anger. The study's findings determined the CPS model allowed for these strong relationships to emerge as staff members described the sense of trust built through the conversations, along with the belief the child was finally being heard and validated. Willis and Nagel (2015) asserted with quality teacher–student relationships come

positive changes on the part of the student.

Positive Impact on Student Achievement and Behaviors

While research on CPS exists, a gap remains regarding training staff to form positive relationships with students (Cook et al., 2018). Absent from research is the perspective of staff who engage in the process of CPS. Staff perceptions of the CPS process, after learning and implementing the method, were 100% favorable in nature (see Table 3). Staff members mirrored Kendziora and Osher's (2016) claim that CPS provides the child with socioemotional learning, which empowers students to solve future problems without adult assistance. Every participant made encouraging remarks about the usefulness of CPS as a strategy to use with students who have experienced trauma and display challenging behaviors.

Anyon et al. (2018) and Obsuth et al. (2017) claimed fewer aggressive behaviors and increased prosocial behaviors when positive teacher–student relationships were present. The findings from the study echoed this claim. Every participant in the study claimed improvement in student behavior or academic achievement once a CPS conversation had occurred. Increased expected behaviors varied between academic achievements and increased prosocial behavior (see Figure 8). Archambault et al. (2017) indicated student participation diminished when positive teacher–student relationships were absent. The findings demonstrated the opposite to be true. When positive relationships are formed, more students meet expectations.

Stetson and Plog (2016) studied the effectiveness of the CPS process and found a decrease in students' antisocial behaviors, a narrowing of skill deficits, and higher levels of self-regulation. The findings from the present study paralleled this claim. Students who were interrupting adults, leaving the class, and not arriving to class on time all made adjustments and began to adhere to the expectations. Children who were not completing work or not asking for

assistance when needed started to turn in work or reach out to the teacher for support.

Participants provided rave reviews of the CPS process as a tool to add to the staff member's toolbox. All of the participants (100%) affirmed the strategy's value and agreed CPS would be a tool that would be useful moving forward.

Limitations

The study was limited by several factors. 100% of the participants in the study were women, leading to an entire demographic (males) not providing a perspective of the process. The sample size was small, and all of the participants were employed by the same urban school district in Illinois. All of the participants worked at the same elementary school in the district. Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019) claimed a single geographic region may not provide a global perspective regarding responses. The results may be generalizable only to elementary staff members in urban school districts with similar student populations.

Time was a limitation due to the short time frame participants had to implement the CPS process. Given more time for implementation, the study may have garnered additional results, which would have provided more data. The study spanned over 10 months. Extra time could give more information and perspectives (Yin, 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic struck just as data collection began, elongating the process for data collection. Initial interviews occurred, and the staff development trainer expected the training to start immediately following the professional development, but delays occurred due to school closures. Consequently, a gap of 3 months occurred between the initial interviews and the start of the training process.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the urban school district in which the study took place declared 100% virtual learning for the entire 2020–2021 school year. Each training session and CPS session took place virtually. This potential limitation may have altered the study's

results regarding the types of unmet student expectations. As staff members have a different level of control regarding behaviors during remote learning (i.e., many parents were home to assist with behavioral expectations), many of the unsolved problems focused on academics. The remote learning may have caused a skewing of the data from what might have occurred during in-person learning, resulting in the findings being transferable only to students in a 100% virtual learning setting.

Recommendations

Suggested recommendations emerged from the findings from the study. The suggestions are practical and applicable. Participants in the study indicated CPS is a useful tool that provided positive results for students, research needs to determine the best way to train educators to implement the model. Notably, the training is only one piece of the rollout. Implementation of the process and practice in the method are essential as well. The findings indicate training for staff is needed and wanted. Additional training could occur to ensure the educators who learn the process continue to refine the discovered skills. While many faculty members in the study enjoyed the process and found CPS beneficial, several felt more support would help ensure correct implementation. Support and feedback while practicing and using the process are essential and needs to come from personnel who are comfortable and experienced using the technique. The school administration must fully champion the technique's implementation process to become a part of the school culture. For CPS to become a part of the culture, school leadership needs to buy into the process and receive training in using CPS and how to support faculty through the process.

Research needs to occur to determine where in a school's behavior management plan CPS fits. Making CPS a requirement for educators before allowing behavior concerns to be sent

to higher school authorities may result in fewer office disciplinary referrals. Creating a school-wide structure to include CPS as an embedded step in the behavior management system could result in more educators using the process and reaping the benefits.

Additional research is recommended to further the findings from this study. As the sample population was a small group of female educators from the same school, further research needs to include a male perspective. The population could consist of middle and high school staff members across a larger geographic band to further collect data.

One concern due to the limitation of virtual learning is the possible distortion of data. Supplementary research could occur based on the in-person setting. Future research could determine if there were a difference in the data between in-person learning and remote learning. The ability to have in-person conversations could change the outcome of the collaborative discussion.

Additional qualitative research needs to transpire. As the study focused on the need to include the student in solving problems emerging in the classroom, potentially due to trauma, research needs to include the child's view regarding the CPS process. Further research needs to occur to determine how students perceive the CPS process. Questions could pertain to the opinions students have while involved in the CPS conversation and any additional insight gained from the process. Future researchers could ask students, if a change occurred, what the impetus for the change was.

The study conducted was a qualitative case study, and further research could occur from a qualitative lens. Quantifiable data regarding teacher perspectives of the problem-solving process and the impact the method has on student's needs to be collected. Qualitative research must be conducted to determine any potential correlation between student achievement and CPS.

A statistical analysis may reveal a possible correlation between the problem-solving process and behavioral advances.

Implications for Leadership

The study aimed to support school staff and administrators in assisting students who have experienced trauma and struggle with behaviors. Research indicates an increase in the number of students who experience trauma before entering school (Holmes et al., 2015). Statman-Weil (2015) highlighted a lack of training provided to educators regarding ways to support traumatized students.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, what are staff perceptions of the collaborative problem-solving model? From the semi-structured interviews, evidence revealed staff members' desire for essential training to build capacity to support students who have faced trauma. Alisic (2012) and Vanderwegen (2013) claimed, with training, staff members are more confident in supporting students. The findings showed medium to inadequate levels of confidence in staff members in regard to helping students with trauma.

The implications could compel schools and districts to offer continued training for staff members on trauma-responsive practices, specifically CPS. Schools and districts need to allocate time in professional development calendars for practical and applicable training around CPS. Districts could agree to include in the strategic plan a commitment to support teachers in trauma-responsive practices. Districts can identify staff member strengths and weaknesses and use professional development time as a platform to build on strengths and to close gaps in teacher weaknesses. Similar to how students are evaluated and supported based on academic gaps, faculty need to follow the same process when it comes to students' behavioral deficiencies.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked, what are teacher perceptions after learning and implementing the collaborative problem-solving process? After receiving training in the CPS process, more staff members described the practice as being beneficial. A strong belief in the importance of students as members in a collaborative process surfaced. Concurring with the findings of Greene and Winkler (2019) and Stetson and Plog (2016), the study's findings reiterated the need for adults to attempt to understand the child's perspective. Staff need to search for the real root of the problem. Conversations free from adult theories and assumptions must occur with students. The assumption-free discussion as a necessary component was discovered by Greene and Winkler. While staff had difficulties refraining from making assumptions about students, many of the educators saw personal growth. While every participant believed the tool was useful, staff members raised some concerns about the difficulty that emerged due to the remote learning.

Implications of these findings are twofold. First, staff members need to be confident in the ability to have collaborative conversations. Leaders can model CPS. All study participants believed the process was helpful, which is why school leaders could be called on to find ways to embed the process into the school's daily workings. Leaders can (a) work with the leadership team to ensure all staff members are comfortable using the process, and then (b) mandate the use of the process. An example would be, before referring a student to the office for a repeated behavior, the CPS method must have occurred, and the adult has documented the process. The second implication is opportunities to use the process in the in-person setting need to occur. Potential adjustments may need to happen in the non-virtual setting, almost as if staff members were starting over with the process. The in-person setting may present alternative challenges, although the nonremote learning could be more conducive to the CPS process.

The implications substantiate both the servant leadership theory (Greenleaf, 1977) and Maslow's (1943) theory of needs. When school leaders focus on the success of the individual students, the result is positive outcomes. When basic needs are fulfilled, human requirements become satisfied, thereby allowing achievement at higher levels within the hierarchy of needs.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, how does collaborative problem solving impact students who have experienced childhood trauma? The findings from the study revealed a positive impact for every student who was involved in the process. While previous research claimed positive relationships generate successful student outcomes (Arincorayan et al., 2017; McConnico et al., 2016; Willis & Nagel, 2015), the findings demonstrated truth in the assertion. The positive impact the CPS process had on students provided implications.

The school district where the research occurred needs to understand the data originated in one elementary school and recognize the high rate of success the CPS model yielded. As a result, the district could expand the training to include the other elementary schools in the district. The school district could serve the students on a global level. The district needs to not ignore the positive advances that transpired in one of the buildings.

Frydman and Mayor (2017), McConnico et al. (2016), and Vona et al. (2018) noted opportunity exists to rebuild school systems to better support student needs. The findings from the study concurred with the previous research. Districts need to challenge schools to recreate trauma-responsive designs and focus on building collaborative relationships between students and staff. The need to support students who have experienced trauma is not diminishing.

Conclusion

The effects of childhood trauma manifest in classrooms across the country in many

different ways (Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018; Stempel et al., 2017). The aim of the study was to examine the perceptions of staff members regarding educator experiences with CPS, a trauma-responsive strategy to apply when students do not meet expectations in the classroom. The goals of the study were met through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. Staff responses were interpreted and analyzed in terms of the research questions.

Emerging from the study's findings is the need to provide additional and more in-depth training for staff members to support students who present challenging behaviors in the classroom due to childhood trauma. Training is needed to support teachers in helping students diminish problematic behaviors displayed as a result of childhood trauma (Barr, 2018; Rosenbaum-Nordoft, 2018). Training supports staff strengths and helps to close the gap in teacher weaknesses. While some participants had received some trauma-responsive training prior to the study, many indicated the desire for more. Faculty admitted staff practices would improve with additional training.

Finally, leaders need to compel schools to examine current systems for behavior management. It is never too late to assess existing practices and search for ways to improve. From the findings in this study, leaders need to consider training staff to implement CPS as a school-wide practice. Through CPS, the results demonstrated evidence of positive gains in student achievement and behavior.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate in a Research Study

Dear (Insert name of the teacher)

My name is Kristin Northern and I am conducting research in partial fulfillment of my Doctorate in Education at American College of Education (ACE). My research will center on teacher perceptions of collaborative problem solving and its use managing the externalizing and internalizing behaviors of children who have been exposed to trauma in the classroom. I am focusing on grades K-5 in order to gain a wider viewpoint of how staff members feel about the collaborative problem solving as a model for working with students who have behavioral challenges.

Your participation in this research includes the following activities:

- Two (2) thirty (30)-minute on-site trainings in collaborative problem solving (CPS).
- Two (2) thirty (30)-minute virtual interviews which will not take place during instructional time.
- A review of the transcripts after the interview to determine accuracy.
- Document collection from the CPS process.
- Two (2) fifteen (15)-minute surveys.

If permission is granted, I will need a signed consent form (attached). Please be aware all information shared will be kept completely confidential. A pseudonym will be assigned to your interview information. Your responses during the interview will only be shared with my dissertation chair and my dissertation review committee. The ACE Internal Review Board may also review the transcripts.

You may terminate your participation in this study at any time without the need to provide a reason.

The hope is this research will inform school and district leaders as well as staff developers regarding the need for training on managing the challenging behaviors of children with trauma in the classroom. Please consider participating in this important work.

Because my dissertation process is on a tight timeline, I would appreciate a response to my request in 7 calendar days. Please let me know if I can provide any further information. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. I can be reached at [REDACTED].com or at [REDACTED]. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Kristin Northern
Doctoral Student American College of Education

Appendix B**Request for Site Permission to Conduct Doctoral Research**

Dear _____,

My name is Kristin Northern and I am conducting research in partial fulfillment of my Doctorate in Education at American College of Education (ACE). When performing research at any site, permission to use a site for research purposes must be obtained. Permission is required to recruit, train, interview, collect data, and to perform all steps in the data collection process which involve a particular site. If the school or district has its own IRB, please let me know, as permission will need to be attained from them as well.

Permission to conduct this research at your site includes the following activities:

- Posting or distribution of recruitment material
- Access to personnel or rosters for recruitment purposes
- One (1) hour to train staff who are recruited – to be broken into two (2) thirty (30) minutes sessions
- Virtual interviews with staff members which will not take place during instructional time.

If permission is granted, I will need a formal letter signed, dated within the last 6 months, written on letterhead, and bearing the full name and contact information of the building principal.

ACE IRB approval has not yet been obtained, recruitment materials will not be distributed, and no participants will be contacted at this time. The request for permission is the first step, and I will contact the building principal with the recruitment materials and a copy of the interview protocol after ACE IRB approval has been obtained.

Because my dissertation process is on a tight timeline, I would appreciate a response to my request in 7 calendar days. Please let me know if I can provide any further information. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. I can be reached at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED]. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Kristin Northern
Doctoral Student American College of Education

Appendix C**Site Permission Letter**

Kristin Northern <knorthern@>

Permission

1 message

Fri, Jan 24, 2020 at 8:41 PM

To: Kristin Northern <knorthern@>

Dear Mrs. Northern,

This email serves as permission granted for you to interview staff members for your dissertation research. I understand that I am granting permission for you to post or distribute recruitment material at the school. Additionally permission will be granted to allow you one hour to train staff participants over two (2) thirty (30) minute sessions. I do understand that participants will choose the location for interview meetings and they may choose to complete the interview on school grounds. I will require that on- or off-site interviews do not take place during instructional time.

You are granted permission to recruit, train, interview, collect data and to perform all steps in the data collection process at 

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Appendix D

Request and Feedback From Subject Matter Experts on Interview Questions



Kristin Northern <kristinnorthern@gmail.com>
to [redacted]

10:25 PM (5 minutes ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Good Evening [redacted]

Below you will find my interview questions for my upcoming dissertation. Would you please provide me with feedback regarding the questions?

We know teachers feel ill-prepared and untrained in how to manage students in their classrooms who present challenges due to trauma. The purpose of the study is to determine teacher perceptions of the Collaborative Proactive Solution Model by Dr. Ross Greene. I would like to learn if the teachers feel learning this model, and implementing it, makes them feel more proficient with challenging students.

Teachers will be interviewed, prior to beginning training in the Collaborative and Proactive Solution. They will be asked the same questions several months after receiving the training. The following questions will be asked:

1. How confident are you in helping students who have poor social-emotional skills?
2. What do you feel are your strengths when working with behaviorally challenging students?
3. What do you struggle with when working with behaviorally challenging students?
4. What trauma responsive training have you received?
5. Does this training, or lack of training, correlate to your identified strengths and weaknesses?
6. What strategies do you use to control behaviors, which are disruptive to your classroom environment?
7. What do you do to motivate students who seem uninterested in learning?
8. How do you calm a student who is visibly upset in your classroom?
9. How do you respond to defiance in the classroom?
10. What do you know about the CPS model? What are your feelings about the process?
11. Do you feel there is a correlation between behavior and student achievement? Why or why not?

I look forward to any feedback you have.

Sincerely,
Kristin Northern



to me ▼

Mon, Aug 26, 1:36 PM (12 days ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

I did look at them. My main question is...how will the teacher determine who has trauma...will they do the ACES on all the students in the classroom...has the student been identified prior to being in the class.

I especially like questions 7 and 8 because I think it gives you a insight into the teacher's belief system, their strengths, their shortfalls. Maybe a question about how long they have been teaching ????

What do you think?

Sorry it took so long to get back to you...



to me ▼

Sun, Aug 18, 10:49 PM (6 days ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮



Hi Kristin!


I looked over the interview questionnaire and I have some suggestions. Overall, I think the questions are great! I would suggest for questions #1 and #4 be written as a multiple choice in order to be less subjective. For example, it would be easy to assess responses when there is consistency in the responder's answer (Example: "How Confident are you...?" 1. Not Confident 2. Somewhat Confident 3. Very Confident; and ".training received.?" 1. None 2. at least 1 workshop/professional development 3. 2-4 pds 4. >5).

Thank you for sharing with me. Looks Great!

Cps questions

Inbox x





to me

Sat, Aug 24, 7:42 PM (16 hours ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Hey,

So I think your questions look great. The only question that sounded a little weird to me was question 6, just something about the way it was worded.

Also in question 1 you ask about students who have poor social emotional skills, in other questions you ask about behaviorally challenging students... I could have low social emotional skills as a student that dont make me a behavior problem..... maybe i withdraw? Every other question has a very direct behavior focus or how challenging behavior effects academics. The question is just throwing me off as to its fit in what you are trying to find out from teachers that they will get out of learning the CPS model.

Good luck!

Thu, Aug 1, 10:21 PM ☆ ↶ ⋮

Hi Kristin - I think these look good. You are covering a lot of important ground.

Here would be some suggestions or things to think about:


- How about the word "address" instead of "control" behavior?
- Is the motivate question a trick'ish kind of question? Ross Greene would say challenging behavior doesn't stem from a motivation problem right?
- Do you want to talk about regulation in a question?

I bring up the regulation because I love Ross Green's work, and I see educators struggle with it because they miss that it goes with the "learn" essential. Kids aren't ready to learn any skill unless they are regulated first.

Hope this helps and best of luck to you! :-)

Take good care,

...



to me

Tue, Aug 20, 7:23 PM (4 days ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Question 1: "poor social emotional skills"? I would use the word lagging in order to align with Green's language.

Question 6: "control"? How about manage since the student is the only one in control of themselves?

Appendix E**Interview Questions**

1. What do you know about collaborative problem solving? What are your feelings about the process?
2. Explain your level of confidence in helping students who have lagging social–emotional skills, who you know have experienced trauma?
3. What do you believe are your strengths when working with students who have experienced trauma and are behaviorally challenging?
4. What do you struggle with when working with behaviorally challenging students who have experienced trauma?
5. What trauma-responsive training or collaborative problem-solving training have you received?
6. Does this training, or lack of training, resemble your identified strengths and weaknesses?
7. What strategies do you use to address behaviors, which are disruptive to your classroom environment?
8. What do you do to encourage students who seem uninterested in learning?
9. What do you notice as indicators when a child is dysregulated?
10. How do you respond when students do not meet expectations in your classroom?
11. What impact, if any, do you notice in student behavior and achievement after implementing the collaborative problem-solving process?

not at all ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Very confident

4. How confident are you in addressing EXTERNALIZED behaviors of challenging students *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very confident

5. How confident are you in recognizing a dysregulated student? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very confident

6. What do you know about the CPS process? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
nothing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I could train other staff members

7. How do you respond to students in your classroom when they do not follow the expectations? *

8. How much do you believe behavior and academic achievement correlate? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
not at all	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	They are directly (proportionately) correlated.

Appendix G

Informed Consent

Introduction: My name is Kristin Northern. I am a doctoral student at American College of Education. I am conducting a research study on the training of staff members in collaborative problem solving in order to address the behavior of students in the classroom. I am completing this research as part of my doctoral degree. I invite you to participate.

Activities: If you participate in this research, you will be asked to:

1. Participate in one (1) hour of training in collaborative problem solving (CPS) - to be broken into two (2) thirty (30) minutes sessions
2. Participate in two semi-structured virtual interviews which will last no more than one hour. The interviews will be recorded for accurate transcription.
3. Read the transcripts of your interview and indicate its accuracy or correct any inaccuracies.
4. Complete two surveys which will last no more than 20 minutes.

Eligibility: You are eligible to participate in this research if you:

1. Are a staff member who has daily direct contact with students.
2. Are willing to participate in at least one hour of training on in CPS.

You are not eligible to participate in this research if you:

1. Are not a staff member who has daily direct contact with students.
2. Are not willing to participate in at least one hour of training in CPS.

Participants will not be removed from the study if they do not complete all steps of the research.

Risks: The risks in this study are minimal. A possible risk would be a lack of comfort in answering some of the interview questions. In order to decrease the impact of this risk, participants may elect not to answer any questions which cause discomfort.

Benefits: Should you decide to participate, the only direct benefit to you would be an acquisition of training which may or may not support your daily interaction with students who have behaviors which need addressing. Potential benefits for others are: inform school and district leaders as well as staff developers regarding the need for training on managing the challenging behaviors of children with trauma in the classroom

Confidentiality: Any information you provide will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. I will be assigning you a pseudonym which will be connected to all information you provide and I obtain. Your real name will never be used or revealed during any portion of the dissertation process.

The people who will have access to your information will be: myself, my dissertation chair, and members of my dissertation committee. The Institutional Review Board may also review my research and view your information.

In order to ensure security of your information, I will lock all paper documentation in a secured location. My computer will remain password protected in order to keep any electronic records secure. Your data will be stored for 3 years and then all electronic and paper data will be destroyed.

Contact Information: I can be reached at [REDACTED] or at [REDACTED]. My dissertation chair's name is Dr. Joyce Cooper. She works at American College of Education and will be supervising me during the research process. Her contact information is Joyce.Cooper@ace.edu. If you have questions about your rights within the research, if any problem has occurred, or if you are injured during your participation, please contact the Institutional Review Board at: irb@ace.edu

Voluntary Participation: Participation is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, or if you stop participation after you start, there will be no penalty to you. You will not lose any benefit to which you are otherwise entitled.

Audiotaping: I would like to use a voice recorder to record your responses. All audio recordings will be transcribed and given to you for review.

Additional Costs: There are no anticipated financial costs to you.

Termination of Participation: Should your participation cause you any emotional or physical distress, I may terminate your participation. If you decide to terminate your participation, you may do so by stating you wish to cease participation in the study. Should you choose to terminate participation, I will not use the information I gathered from you.

New Findings: At times during a research study, new information is uncovered. This could come from outside sources as well as from our own study. Should any new information relate to your participation, the information will be disclosed to you as soon as possible.

Signature: A signature indicates your understanding of this consent form. You will be given a copy of the form for your information.

Participant's Printed Name

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Appendix H**Citi Certificate**

Completion Date 17-Jun-2019
Expiration Date 16-Jun-2022
Record ID 32088604

This is to certify that:

Kristin Northern

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers (Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

American College of Education



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wdf548ff6-1edc-4ac7-a094-23af6f1e4dc8-32088604
